



# **TAGORE'S VISION OF A GLOBAL FAMILY**

**DR. VIVEK RANJAN BHATTACHARYA**

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who was the first Asian to get Nobel Prize for literature on November 13, 1913, was a versatile personality. He represents the quintessence of Indian culture and philosophy.

Dr. Bhattacharya discusses in this book the different facets of the World Poet's literary talents. Tagore, besides being a great poet, was also a good short story writer, a novelist, a playwright, an essayist and, to surprise all, a great painter of repute. He drew his inspiration from the teachings of the Upanishadas by his saintly father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, the Vaishnava Poets of Bengal, the spiritual poems by Guru Nanak, the teachings of the Light of Asia—Buddha. He was deeply drenched in the immortal message of the Saints of India—Universal Brotherhood of Man. He was first a great patriot, a nationalist, then he dreamt of One Asia. Along with the Japanese philosopher-artist Okakura he declared **Asia is one**. But the mind always grows along with one's inner enlightenment. The barriers of social boundaries or national four walls could not keep his restless mind limited to India or Asia. He dreamt finally of a global family. That is his greatest message. That is analysed in this unique book stage by stage. Each step is significant, because it leaves an imprint in the progress of human relation and understanding.

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A GLOBAL FAMILY

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# TAGORE'S VISION OF A GLOBAL FAMILY

By  
DR. VIVEK RANJAN BHATTACHARYA  
M.A. PH.D.

Foreword by  
Honourable SHRI VASANT SATHE  
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*Dedicated to  
Smt. Kamala Banerjee  
and  
Shri M. Banerjee*



MINISTER OF ENERGY  
INDIA  
NEW DELHI-110001

January 3, 1987.

## FOREWORD

This year we celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of the World Poet, Visva Kavi, Rabindranath Tagore. The versatility of the poet had touched not only the Indian life-style through the transmission of his noble thoughts of universal brotherhood of man, his prophetic vision of a world catastrophe in the absence of a cordial relation between man and man, has come so true today.

In his vision, Tagore felt the presence of a calamity all the world over created by hatred and mutual misunderstanding between nation and nation. His latest warning in **Crisis in Civilisation** could tell us, much in advance, of the alarming danger of international conflicts for power. This materialistic power, unfortunately cannot give peace that is so necessary for proper human development. What is needed is a proper value judgement. And that the poet discovered through his self-realisation not only in the *Upanishadic* utterances which he so endearingly learnt from his saintly father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore but also in the immortal messages of the great savants of India—Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Tukaram, Gyaneswar, Jayadeva, Tulsidas, Surdas, Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya and a host of other great minstrels of God. He was much influenced by great compassion of the Sufi saints and the message of love and brotherhood of the Holy Christ. Throughout his life, the poet sang to the glory of God expressed through the smiles and tears of humankind. His *Hibbert Lectures* of 1930 in Oxford University—**The Religion of Man**,



clearly indicates his real direction to spirituality through oneness of humankind. Besides the Nobel Prize-winning *Gitanjali*, the poet's spirituality got reflected in his innumerable poems in *Gitali*, *Gitimalya*, *Naibedya*. These were the song offerings to the divinity. These songs read like hymns and as such are also prayed in the holy places on sacred occasions.

In the realm of patriotism, Tagore was second to none. His stirring songs during the *Swadeshi* movement or later on great marching songs sung in the sessions of the Indian National Congress are treasures for the whole world, particularly inspiring those countries yet fighting for their liberation. Tagore was the only poet whose two songs have been adopted as the popular national anthems of two great sub-continent—India and Bangladesh—*Jana Gana Mana* and *Sonar Bangla*.

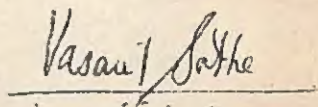
Tagore's paintings, novels, short stories, long critical articles are only manifestations of the poet's great versatility. What touches a reader the most is his great feeling for the poor, the down-trodden. His challenge against social injustice, his warning against social exploitation are reflected not only in his great poems like *Apamanita* in *Gitanjali*, or *Africa*. His novels too express his inner dissatisfaction against political and economic exploitation of one class by another, one nation by another. He created a consciousness among people, specially the masses to generate a feeling of self-confidence among the men and nations.

Tagore was not a mere ideal dreamer. Rabindranath has translated his thoughts into practice. He has given shape to his concept of universality of mankind through the great institution—*Visva Bharati*, which is like his *Manasputra*. This great university has been a living symbol of Rabindranath's realisation of a global family consisting of people of all races, creeds and castes.

I am glad to know that Dr. Vivek Ranjan Bhattacharya has written a scholarly book—*TAGORE'S VISION OF A GLOBAL FAMILY*. This is a most timely publication and a befitting tribute to the poet on the sacred occasion at a time when the world needs proper guidance in saving humanity from the dangers of nuclear wars, mental distrust and hatred. Dr. Bhattacharya painstakingly has analysed the poet's contribution

in creating a world atmosphere through saving man not only from class conflict, caste conflict and ideology conflict, but also save mankind from the endangering of a culture of machine age. The Poet has warned in the **Red Oleander** how machine is mastering over man. His protest against this mechanisation of human character, also reflected in **Tasher Desh**, is so apt everywhere today.

I wish the publication all success.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Vasant Sathe", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vasant" and the last name "Sathe" clearly distinguishable.

(VASANT SATHE)

## PREFACE

*Rabindranath Tagore's Vision of a Global Family* is the final resultant of the World Poet's constant thinking process for long sixty or seventy years. The Poet started writing poems at the early age of seven. He wrote till his last day.

This thought process can be scanned roughly quite justifiably to have had passed through four stages. If one takes pain to analyse the Poet's earlier literary works he would find that Rabindranath wrote basically on Bengal. The subject matter got restricted to the life in rural Bengal. The *Swadeshi Movement* gathered momentum. The anti-partition drive took a turn that made it into all India-arena.

From the songs on Bengal the Poet turns to *Swadesh*. The whole of India is covered by the second thought process. *Swadeshi Samaj*, the patriotic songs on India included in *Swadesh* under this category. The writings spread also on novels, articles, lectures and poems.

The third stage comes when Rabindranath joins Okakura, the great Japanese artist-thinker in his movement—*Asia is one*. He addressed a number of conferences both in India and Asian countries. That was the seed of the Asian Relations Conference sowed by the Poet long before.

Finally, we find the Poet talking only of the *Universal Man*. It is left to a researcher to analyse the entire works of the Poet in this backdrop. It will be quite a useful drill.

His *Religion of Man* is a testament of his religious thoughts. Man is the hero there, the divisions, subdivisions, sects, castes



and creeds are redundant. It is here that Poet is at his peak of thoughts. It is here that he gives his best to the world. Here he joins the great Savants of India—Nanak, Chaitanya, Surdas, Kabir, Dadu and a host of dedicated souls whose immortal message of universal brotherhood of man is the only panacea for the malice ravaged and lust loving materialistic world. This message of peace is the most significant and meaningful contribution of Rabindranath's whole life's continuous efforts.

This humble publication, on auspicious 125th birth anniversary of the World Poet would have not come before the readers in time but for the team work of the Enkay Publishers. I thank all of them personally.

I thank all the scholars and authors from whose mines of knowledge I have borrowed freely. Finally I thank my readers to whom I leave the final judgment.

Finally, I must thank Shri Vasant Sathe, Minister for Energy for kindly writing the learned Foreward to the book. It has definitely added prestige to the publication.

J-1972, Chittaranjan Park,  
New Delhi 110019  
January 5, 1987:

VIVEK RANJAN BHATTACHARYA

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# 1 | AN INTRODUCTION

The whole world joins India in celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of the World Poet throughout the year. The appearance of Rabindranath Tagore in the realm of literature is indeed a great event. Not that it was something strange. Tagore represents a family of Jorasanko where atleast a dozen internationally famous men were born. His grandfather Prince Dwarkanath Tagore was one of the most cultured personalities in the British empire to the extent of being a personal intimate friend of Queen Victoria! His illustrious father was one of the pathfinders of the new Renaissance Movement in India. He was one of the leading figures of Brahmo Samaj. He was affectionately addressed as *Maharshi*, meaning thereby a saintly personality. His brother Satyendranath Tagore was the first member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). His nephew Abanindranath Tagore was the father of the new Art Movement in India. So was Gaganendranath Tagore. His elder sister Swarnakumari Devi was a poetess of repute. His sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, actually the main inspiration in the poet's literary career, was an accomplished connoisseur of art and literature. It was she who fired the imagination in the mind of young Tagore to aspire to be a poet to draw her special affection. The Tagores used to stage dramas in their own Jorasanko house. They used to run their own literary family journals. To quote Will Durant's *Story of Civilization*, there is hardly any parallel in the world to such an illustrious family as the Tagores of Jorasanko.

As far as Rabindranath was concerned, it will be too little to describe him as versatile. He was a great poet, an eminent novelist, a playwright, a great short story writer, an editor, an essayist, a great painter, a prince among patriots, a great social reformer, an educationist and above all an outstanding savant-like champion for the cause of universality of humankind. He was a towering personality—the tallest among the tall.

Tagore learnt music religiously from the most illustrious musician of India Jadu Bhatta. His brother Jyotirindranath was an excellent master of music and he gave choreography to many of his songs. His nephew Surendranath Tagore and neices Indira and Nandita were exponents of classical dance, besides being excellent musicians.

The new light of reformation movement came from the window of the Tagores of Jorasanko and it is no wonder that he was the first recipient of the coveted Nobel Award for literature, the first Asian to get such recognition. Critics will agree that many of his later literary pieces had surpassed Tagore's own *Gitanjali*. He suffered mentally a lot due to literary rivals' malicious bitter criticism. He was confronted with many family tragedies. He tasted the hazards and joys of life. So when one reads or hears his music, it pierces into one's heart. It seems Tagore is describing his readers' own personal joy and suffering of every day's life. Tagore's poems represent hope and aspiration of humankind. Rabindranath Tagore had written more than two thousand two hundred poems. They were given tunes mostly by the poet himself. A compilation under the title *Gitabitan* was not liked by the Poet because in a hurry all the poems were jumbled up in an unruly compilation. Towards the end of his life the Poet himself took up the task of classifying the songs under different categories. He categorised them under *Puja* (Prayer Songs or Hymns), *Parinaya* (Love Lyrics), *Swadesh* (Patriotism), *Prem* (Love Songs), *Prakirti* (on Nature specially on the six seasons), *Bichitra* (miscellaneous) and *Anusthhaniky* connected with events. They were again sub-divided by the poet himself. A contemporary scholar who was quite close to the Poet, Professor Sudhir Kar tells us how days after days the poet would be spending all his energy in the arduous task of scanning each poem and classifying it under separate categories.

More than five hundred songs were on love. These romantic songs were either parts of interlocutory dance dramas by the poet or written on request. The rest were written on his own. Most surprisingly, a majority of these romantic songs were written after the poet crossed forty! The one volume edition of *Gitanitan* came out duly arranged six months after the poet's demise.

By and large, Tagore's greatest contribution to world thinking and understanding is his vision of a world family. Very much like Sri Aurobindo, the great saint of Pondicherry, Tagore had been dreaming of bringing the world nearer. That was the main idea behind his setting up of the World University—Visva Bharati at Santiniketan. He declared with the greatest joy and ecstasy "this is Visva Bharati where the world makes a home in a single nest."

Tagore made it clear that "Knowledge flows in two streams—from the East and from the West. In their unity is perceived the oneness of Truth that pervades and sustains the entire universe. This we avow."

"In the realization of this one-ness of Truth lies mighty gain, perfect peace and profound good of Man. This we truly believe."

These are the mottoes of the Poet's World University at Santiniketan.

Tagore was not merely a visionary. He had a practical approach for everything. In his own life he had some of the best friends who hailed from both East and West. If one cares to read the intimate letters or descriptions or appreciations by his western friends one is struck with a deep feeling of wonder. It is indeed something very rare. The letters, for instance, from Yeats or William Rothensteine or from Earnest Rhys or Stopford A. Brooke, or Nicholas Roerich, C.F. Andrews or W.W. Pearson or M. Winternitz or his conversation with Romain Rolland show their great affectionate regards for the poet. They became almost parts of the same family. Tagore had a magnetic charm. He had a tremendous power of attraction. He was accepted by many as the idol of their hearts. Some even expressed their reverence for him as they had for Lord Christ.

Even persons who met him for a short while could not ignore his charm. For instance, during his stay in America for the



first time for six months, among his many new friends was Harriet Monroe. He was the Editor of *Poetry*, a Chicago magazine of verse and was the first to publish six of Rabindranath's *Gitanjali* poems in English, outside India. That was much before the Nobel Award to the poet. Obviously Monroe had every reason to be proud to felicitate the poet when for the same poems he got world's most coveted prize. In a letter from Chicago ten days after the declaration of the Nobel Award to Tagore, Monroe wrote "my most ardent felicitations upon this new honour which has been accorded you! You may imagine with what joy I received the news at the *Tribune* office one afternoon, the day before it was published. It was a great day for all your friends here."

Monroe thought Americans felt "it was a great day for the world". Very proudly he wrote, "*Poetry* felt very proud indeed of having been the first American magazine to present you to its readers."

It became a fashion everywhere to carry a copy of *Gitanjali* among the *elite* throughout the world. Many of his distant alien disciples started quoting his own lines in their letters. "Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles." They have recorded how they recited him at night. Helen Meyer Franck, who translated Tagore's poems into German and brought out a collected edition of his works in 1921 records how she recited poems from *Gitanjali* at night as a prayer psalm. Similarly Madame Jimenez translated Rabindranath's works into Spanish in collaboration with her illustrious husband Juan Ramon Jimenez who also won the Nobel Prize in 1956. She used to write letters to the Poet regularly from Madrid. Pearson considered Tagore a manifestation of Christ. C.F. Andrews in every letter addressed the Poet as "the dearest and best friend in the world". In a personal letter he records, "for the moment your name is called or an audience can be found who will listen to your name, my own personality is raised a hundred fold." From Paris came Sylvain Levi and from Rome Prof. Tucci. Levi writes, "what a sweet time we had listening to your songs, to your music. I think that there is no power of evocation more efficient in the world than music; pictures and words reach eyes and mind and heart, music appeals to the whole self."

Tagore's poems were given tunes by himself. One of the greatest exponents of Rabindra Sangeet, Prof. Dhurjati Mukherjee writes, "Tagore is no mere writer of songs as many would wrongly believe. Excepting some of the very early period he has seldom written a poem to be set to music at leisure. Poems and their musical forms came to him complete at one and the same moment." This is definitely the result of a divine gift.

His equally talented elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore too helped him. *Rabindra Sangeet* have the universal appeal everywhere because they reflect the inner voice of the explorers of secret Truth. The savants and sages in their great agony to enkindle the inner glow of enlightenment spent their lives in meditations. Tagore's whole family had the regular drill of silent meditation for hours. His father was addressed as *Maharshi* meaning thereby a great saint, because of his deep spiritual pursuit. Tagore's Mother used to ask the child Rabindranath to read out loudly the great epic like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Maharshi Devendranath Tagore gave him regular lessons on the *Upanishads* specially when the child had accompanied him at *Dalhousie*, a hill resort on the lap of the Himalayas. So he could recite many of the passages from this great scriptures. It was also here that the poet was introduced to the philosophy of the Founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev. He would visit a *Gurudwara* or the Sikh temples there with his father. Later on many of the original poems of the Sikh Guru Nanak Devji got reflected in his poems and songs. They are sung mostly in the classical style even in the temples as daily prayers.

One of the poet's very close associates Acharya Kshitimohan Sen tells us "very early in life Rabindranath had made a careful study of the *Upanishads*; his own spiritual career, his *sadhana* had found in them inspiration and sustenance. No wonder that many of their ideas have often crept into some of his sermons and religious songs as well." In *Naivedya* some of the songs are *ad verbatim* transliteration of the poems in the *Rig Veda*s or the *Upanishads*.

It is also from here that the Poet draws his inspiration to describe man as God. Very much like the great American poet Walt Whitman, whom he used to read quite often and who was

a contemporary of his illustrious father Rabindranath wrote, "God spreads His own seat in the midst of humanity at large. He accompanies them in their rise and fall and their joys and suffering. One must serve and worship Him there in the proper place of his residence. But we remain ever blind to this fact and seek him in vain in man-made temples and ideals."

In his *Gitanjali* Tagore writes, "he is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust." This is in complete tune with *Vedanta*. Tagore is the torch-bearer of modern age with ancient learning and self realised inner Truth and Enlightenment. It has been said about the epics of Indian philosophy, specially the *Vedas* that if you have studied *Rig Veda* then the utmost that you may have known is about the gods; if you have studied *Yadurveda*, then you have learnt the details of all sacrificial rites; if you have studied *Samavada* then you perhaps have known everything else that is external but if you have mastered the *Veda* of your inner mind—*Manasa Veda*, only then you have realised the *Brahman*, the universal God.

Tagore had that inner light. That is why his poems have a universal appeal. It has been aptly observed by a scholar of Tagore literature that "Rabindranath bears a very close relationship with the seers of ancient India who gave utterance to the greatest truths that they had realised in their own life."

Tagore was fond of the great American poet Whitman. Tagore compares with Whitman in so many ways. In his famous poem in *Gitanjali*, he describes himself, like Whitman a wayfarer, a wanderer, a pilgrim and he says, "none can stop me from my long journey (into the unknown)." He is a pilgrim engrossed and intoxicated in the long journey. He had the eternal call of the endless path. This longing for the Infinite, the unknown search for the limitless, makes the mainstream of the poet's two thousand and two hundred songs. He does not pray to God to save him. He wants inner strength to survive the hazards of life. In suffering and pangs of pain he finds the blissful touch of the divinity. We shall discuss this in a separate chapter later. In more than one poems in *Gitanjali*, Tagore clearly asks the divine invisible



power to purify him by immense suffering. It is just like touch of fire for gold which brightens it, which purifies it eternally,

*Ai korechcho bhalo nithhur hay*

or

*Bipadey moray raksha karo*

are only some of them to mention.

They are the best pieces in *Gitanjali*. Equally important are the songs against injustice to man. He stirred the dependent nations to fight tooth and nail for freedom. He is the only poet in the world whose poems are today the National Anthem of two great sub-continent—India and Bangladesh. Both *Jana Gana* and *Sonar Bangla* are soul stirring songs.

Tagore's best pieces however are on spirituality. He now surrenders himself to God and begs inner enlightenment. In famous poems like *Antarjami* in *Chitra* or *Jivandevata* (*Chitra*), *Maran Dola* (*Utsarga*), *Bandhan* (*Sonar Tari*), *Chhabi* (*Balaka*), Tagore clearly observes that life does not end here. There is life after life. In some of the most mystic poems in *Gitanjali*, *Balaka*, *Naibedya*, *Prabhat Sangit*, *Sonartari*, Tagore discuss the mystery surrounding death. The strange aspect of the poet's mind is that even in his earlier poems written in his teens like *Bhanusinha Thakurer Padavali*; *Prabhat Sangeet* or even *Kori O Komal*, Tagore dives deep into exploring the real mystery of death. Tagore says like Romain Rolland "O life is a succession of deaths and resurrections, we die Christopher, to be born again". The finite gets mingled with the Infinite. It is just like the Western poet who said:

"Earth knows no desolation,  
She smells regeneration,  
In the moist breath of decay,"

The mystic in the poet goads him frequently to enkindle the inner light. They sing like psams. Some of such sweetest psams praying for self enlightenment by Tagore are:

*Antara mama bikasita karo*

(Let the flower of my soul bloom)

*Amar sakal ange tomar paras*

(Life of my life, I shall ever try,)

(Gitanjali);

*Alo amar alo ogo, alo bhubon bhor*

(Light my light, O light, world filling)

*Amar satya mithya sakali bhulaye dao*

(Make me forget all truth, all untruth)

*Akas bhara surya tara visva bhara pran*

(My heart sings at the wonder of my place).

Besides these psams, the poems on the appreciation of beauty are simply superb. Tagore's poems were drenched not only with the thoughts of the *Upamishadas* and *Vedas*. The *Vaishnava* thoughts and the message of the *Light of Asia*, Lord Buddha left deep imprint in his mind and he could not resist the temptations of quoting their immortal messages in his sweet lyrics. He pleads in all these songs for World Peace and Brotherhood of Man. He was deeply influenced by Holy Christ.

In his famous lines in *Utsarga*, Tagore laments "I have my home everywhere in the world and how I kill myself by searching that home". In keeping with Indian age old tradition of hospitality—in the *Vedas*, a guest is treated next only to the preceptor—Tagore reflected that spirit of Universality of Man. That was his greatest message to the world.

## A MASTER PAINTER

It is not perhaps known to many that Tagore's first love, to quote his own expression, was not poems but paintings. He wanted to be a painter. He did become one. He spent the later part of his life in drawing paintings. Canvas attracted him more than lyric writing. He had written two thousand two hundred poems but surprisingly this number was surpassed by the number of canvases he had painted. They exceeded three thousand! Tagore organised exhibition of his paintings in many world famous art galleries. Glowing tributes have been paid by world famous artists and critics like Stella Kramrisch, Henry Bridou, Benode Behari Mukhopadhyaya and others. They are simply

poems in colour. Rabindranath "by his rhythmic movements of line and grace of forms created such an extraordinary atmosphere that before long it led to a conflict between his creative faculty and inventive instinct." There too his love for Nature got manifested throughout his works.

## A GREAT STORY TELLER

Tagore was a great story teller. He could fascinate anybody by his thrilling stories. In his memoirs he refers to two of his personal servants and one teacher from whom he picked up the art of story telling. He was a master as a short story writer. His *Galpaguchha*, collection of short stories have run into dozens of editions. Many of them have been translated in different major languages of the world. Quite a number of them have been screened even. *Kabuliwala* or *The Hungry Stone* are indeed classics by themselves. There too the Poet could not get rid of his mystic touches. Depiction of the deep affectionate human relations is the common theme, like his lyrics, all along in these numerous stories. Many of his long prose-poems too have been written narrating beautiful day-to-day anecdotes with social problems. They reflect the agony of the writer for the victims of social ills.

## TAGORE THE PLAYWRIGHT

Rabindranath, besides being a great musician was himself a great dramatist. His *Mayar Khela*, with some of the sweetest romantic songs was the first musical play in India. "The love-lyrics of *Mayar Khela* have all the lightness and brightness and sadness and tenderness of love without passion" said Indira Devi Chudhurani who participated in it with her illustrious uncle poet. Before that at 18, Tagore had written *Bhagna Hriday* (The Broken Heart). It was followed by *Rudra Chanda* in blank verse.

*Valmiki Pratibha* was another early drama by Tagore where the poet himself played the title role. *Prakritir Parishodh* (Nature's Revenge), *Raja O Rani* (The King and the Queen) and *Chitra* are like *Dakghar* (Post Office) and *Phalgumi* (The cycle of

Spring) are symbolical types of dramas. In *Valmiki Pratibha*, the poet introduced the Irish melody by Moore. As in *Valmiki Pratibha*, Rabindranath played the title role also in *Kal Mrigaya*. Among the social plays are *Shesh Raksha*, *Hrin Sodh*, *Anrup Ratan* and *Prayashchitta*. Perhaps Tagore's best contribution in the realm of dramatics were the interlocutory dance dramas, there too specially the ones centring round the six cycles of nature—the fury of summer, the mystic cloudy rains, the sweet dew drenched touch of autumn, the snow peaked winter and the king of seasons—the honey dewed spring—*Madhu Basanta*. *Basanta*, *Phalguni* fall under these categories. Nature is worshipped as the touch of mysticism make them nobler and higher. In *Phalguni* Tagore elucidates the idea “to know life properly we get its real manifestation through death.” Both *Tasher Desh* (Kingdom of Cards) and *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleanders) are machine dramas. There the poet protest against mechanical drudgeries to man's exploitation against nature. *Sacrifice* or *Bisarjan* is perhaps one of the best dramas in the world literature. A great oriental scholar wrote “*Sacrifice* was the greatest drama in Bengali literature. All these dramas are vehicles of thought other than expression and they show the poet's mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its ritual of bloody sacrifice”. It is a protest against violence.

Many of Tagore's dramas started with so great challenge and novelties that critics in the beginning took time to understand their proper message and wrongly described them as undramatic. They took much time to change their views finally.

## AS A NOVELIST

Tagore's novels are so vivid and lively that one feels it is a narration about his own life. *Bou Thakurani's Heat*, *Char Adhyay*, *Gora*, *Charulata* *Sesher Kabita* (Farewell, My Friend), *Chokher Bali* (Binodini) and many.

By far the best of all the novels of the poet had been *Sesher Kabita*. It has been wonderfully rendered into English under the title “Farewell, My Friend” by Krishna Kripalani. There the novelist in Tagore, like his poems, gives something original that



is platonic love. It is not necessary between man and a woman only to have physical interaction. This can be even better and higher in an intellectual level. This perhaps is the first of its kind in Indian literature.

## A GREAT SOCIAL THINKER

Rabindranath, besides being one of the greatest lyric poets of all times was a great social thinker and a mass communicator. As a great social reformer and patriot he joined, rather gave a lead to the contemporary social thinking on problems of national and international interest. Mostly they were either written or delivered in seminars in his mother tongue. They were thought provoking but their readership was restricted only to a few million Bengalis. During the Centenary year an excellent publication was simultaneously published from India, USA and the United Kingdom containing the best of Tagore's thoughts on society, education, politics, economics and religion under the title *Towards Universal Man*. The Government of India, Ministry of Education and Culture brought it out in collaboration with the Ford Foundation. Eminent Tagore scholars from the East and the West translated, edited and collated the compilation. Besides that another compilation by the eminent Tagore Scholar Dr. Sasadhar Sinha, entitled *Social Thinking of Tagore* was also brought out on that occasion. The *Visva Bharati Quarterly* too brought out a rich special centenary number consisting of rich contributions by close associates and learned scholars on different aspects and facets of the versatile poet.

Tagore's mysticism was further deepened by close association with the *Bauls* of Bengal. These *Bauls* are a lot of wandering bards. They have no specific religious binding. They are a happy blending of the Hindu Muslim philosophies. They represent the highest thoughts of renunciation of material things of life. Great Bauls like Lalan Fakir of Bangladesh inspired him so much that Tagore brought the Bauls' lyric of Bengal to an international status in human philosophy when the poet referred to it specially as a medium of perfect divine bliss in his famous Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford at Manchester College during the month of May 1930. This was later on published in his *Religion of Man*.

The poet was simply fascinated by these wandering bands specially because like Whitman, he himself was fond of wandering aimlessly. "The Baul Cult is followed by householders as well as homeless wanderers, neither of whom acknowledge class or caste, special deities, temples or sacred places....The human body, despised by most other religions, thus for them the holy of holies, wherein the Divine is intimately enshrined as the Man of the Heart. And in this wise is the dignity of Man upheld by them."

## 2 | GURUDEV— THE PRECEPTOR OF MANKIND

Rabindranath Tagore was a giant among the literary luminaries of India. All his life, he championed the cause of the poor and the downtrodden at home and abroad.

He was affectionately called *Gurudev* because he reflected and exemplified the best of India's spiritual and cultural heritage. Rabindranath's two thousand and two hundred songs expressed the hopes and despair of millions of Indians. They mirrored in a literary shape the image of Indian philosophy. His immortal songs depicted the soul stirring message of hope to a nation which, for two centuries, was groaning under foreign shackles. Tagore's stirring patriotic songs played a vital role in the freedom movement not only in India; his songs most forcefully inspired even the freedom fighters in neighbouring Bangladesh. He was perhaps the only poet in the world whose two songs have been adopted as the national anthem of two nations—India and Bangladesh. As the Morning Song of India—*Janaganamana* inspired the people of India; his equally sweet song—*Amar Sonar Bangla ami tomae bhalo bashi* thrilled the people of Bangladesh. Both are equally popular to one and all who understand Bengali.

Some of Tagore's best patriotic songs were composed on the proposed partition of Bengal. Curzon announced on December 3, 1903 that Bengal would be partitioned. The whole country resisted it. Tagore too played an active role in the agitation that followed. He joined with all his vigour the fresh poli-

tical movement. He most vigorously rebelled against tyranny. His poems of protest moved his countrymen profoundly. They got deeply inspired by these songs. Rabindranath played the most important role of the bugleman in the battlefield.

During the anti-partition agitation and the *Swadeshi Movement* which followed, the *Raakhi Bandhan* festival was popularised to foster a sense of oneness. Tagore composed the famous song: "Blessed be the soil and water of Bengal". The song, *Banglar mati Banglar jal*, which harped on the unity of Bengali life, culture and people, enthralled thousands. His vision transcended the limits of the political struggle for independence.

Tagore was deeply committed to India's unity and sensitive to its diversity. *Bharat Tirtha* featuring in *Gitanjali* represents one of his most patriotic celebrated verses. Almost all of his poems mirrored his deep concern for the underdog. In *Durbhaga Desh* (The Unfortunate Country) he warned his countrymen that they would have to be one in common misfortune with those of their brothers whom they have hated and insulted.

In all his works, Tagore emphasised the need for self-reliance. He had an abiding faith in the future of India, where society placed greater emphasis on humanism than nationhood or statism (*Bharatbarsha Rashtrapradhan Desh Noy*). His confidence in the youth never waned. He asked the "green, the unwise and the unripe" to arouse the half-dead with a blow. But underneath all this and linking the many facets of his genius was his profound spiritualism and concern for the future of humankind.

Who would believe that Tagore eagerly desired to become a painter rather than a poet? Rabindranath did paint hundreds of canvases with a brush equally competently as his facile pen produced poems. He earned laurels as a great painter. The number of such paintings which were about three thousand surprisingly surpassed the number of poems and songs. All these could be attributed to his restless mind; he was always in search of Truth. In his own words, *ami chanchalo hay ami sudurer piyashi*, I am restless, I am madly thirsty for the great distant (Truth). He was, by and large, a worshipper of truth and beauty—*Satyam, Shivam, Sumdaram*. Nature had cast its en-



chanting spell on him and he in turn reflected them before the public. People become rapturous by the expressions used. The communication which he sought to develop was direct, deep and penetrating. He could express his thoughts in grief or joy so perfectly. This became possible only through deep meditation—*tapasya*. He identified himself with his people.

Rabindranath was unequivocal in condemning social injustice, economic exploitation not only in his own country, he pointed his finger in protest against any acts of injustice, or threat to peace or human liberty. Innumerable were his songs condemning the corroding effect of caste system. Asking for atonement he described his beloved country as *Durbhaga Desh*—(The Unfortunate Country), which permitted the affront for centuries, of one class by another. At the same time he recorded his ecstasy over his birth in this holy land—*Sarthhak janam more janmechhi ei deshe*.

Was he a poet of the people? The poet in his famous poem *Oikatan* raised this question himself and reserved his felicitations for the future poet who would reflect the hopes and aspirations of the masses. But who could express these subtle thoughts so perfectly like him? He was, by and large, a poet of the people *par excellence*.

Tagore's short stories are equally unique. Each story is a class by itself—*Hungry Stone* or *Kabuliwala* or for that matter any story from *Galpaguchcha* would keep any reader spell bound. As a playwright too, Tagore's success was so phenomenal mainly because he was an actor himself. Right from his younger days, he had been playing the hero's role in the Jorasanko Tagore family team. His role in *Balmiki Pratibha* was perhaps the first promise of the budding genius as a playwright. His novels were equally absorbing. Strangely, there has been no repetition of any character. Each was an independent experiment. *Sesher Kabita*, *Farewell*, *My Friend* could perhaps be classed as the sweetest piece of a novel. Tagore was awarded the most prestigious Nobel Prize for his immortal *Gitanjali* but students of Tagore Literature would agree that at least a dozen of his treatises on prayer songs like *Gitali*, *Gitimalya* or *Naibedya* too could claim separately that coveted honour equally on merit.

Tagore was at his peak in his communion with the Infinite. That truly reflected the spirit, the inner soul of Indian culture. It was for this reason that Indians endearingly call him their *Gurudev*, the Preceptor.

### 3 | EARLY CHILDHOOD

“Civilisation”, it is said, “varies with the family and family with civilisation.” Will Durant, the great historian has aptly described the Tagore family as one of the “great families of history” who had played an important role in the progress of civilisation. The members of the Tagore family were pioneers among those who fuelled the fire of the *Renaissance Movement* in India.

The Tagores had a lofty cultural heritage. They descend from the ‘Peerali Brahmins.’ “Bengalee was their vernacular, Sanskrit their heritage, Persian their tradition, English their acquisition.” So in this cultural heritage, Rabindranath was fortunate enough to inherit the best of the three cultures—the Hindu, the Muslim and to some extent English. The Tagores, through their business connections, had come very close to the Englishmen. It was indeed a harmonious blending of the best that India could possibly offer in the cultural field. The child Rabindranath was lucky to have been brought up in this liberal environment. This certainly helped him to build up the ideal of a universal man.

A learned scholar friend of Tagore has given an apt description of the poet and the culture he inherited. “In dress he (i.e. Rabindranath) preferred the flowing robes of the Mughal grandees to the loose habiliments in which the Bengalee Zamin-dar (landlord) liked to flaunt his ample leisure. His speech had the distinctive and full-toned enunciation of refinement and

grace to which so much value was attached by Sanskrit scholars. In manners, he had a natural horror of ostentation, and preferred the reticence and reserve of the English...He had the rich artistic sensibility of the Persians. . . ."

In the house of Tagores, one could hear and see the sweet tunes of music and painting at its best. Here, scholars and learned pundits from India and abroad would assemble to discuss how a man could better his lot and lead an ideal life. The leaders of the country enjoyed their stay with the Tagore family whenever they happened to visit Calcutta. In short, the Tagore House was like a bee-nest where all manner of people came from far and near and stored their knowledge at one place.

The members of the Tagore family distinguished themselves as great connoisseurs of art and literature. Prince Dwarkanath, the grandfather of Rabindranath, was a distinguished scholar and a great patron of learning. Rabindranath's father, Maharshi Devendranath, was a great reformer. He was the head of the *Brahmo Samaj* movement. Girindranath, the uncle of Rabindranath, wrote many plays. He had his own touring dramatic club. Dwijendranath, the elder brother of Rabindranath, wrote beautiful poems. Another brother of Rabindranath, Jyotirindranath, was very fond of reading Sanskrit and Persian stories. Swarna Kumari, the sister of Rabindranath, wrote many poems and stories. She was the editor of a monthly journal *The Bharati*. Who has not read the stories of Abanindranath, the one and only Abanindranath who heralded the dawn of the modern school of painting in India. Gaganendranath, the great painter, too belonged to his family. Sudhindranath earned a name for his originality in writing short stories and Balendranath for his essays.

The young boys and girls of the Tagore House took part in the amateur theatres. When any new play was staged the learned people of Calcutta were invited. These amateur theatres disseminated knowledge among the people. The drama, *Valmiki Pratibha*, which was written by Rabindranath in his young age, was staged first of all in his own house with Tagore in the main role.

Later when Rabindranath wrote *Post Office*, he himself took part in the drama. This was staged on the roof of their house at Jorasanko. On this occasion, he invited many national



of the country to his house. *Jana Gana Mana*, the popular National Anthem of India was written by Rabindranath in honour of these respectable guests who had gathered in Tagore's House. The sweet notes of our National Song first echoed and reverberated on the roof of the Tagore's Houses.

## THE MOTHER'S ROLE

Rabindranath's mother, Sharada Devi, was very fond of reading books. She always had one book or the other in her hand. She would do her domestic work holding the book in her hands. She was fond of reading the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Rabindranath also picked up interest in these epics.

His mother loved him most but she could never look after him properly. According to the then prevalent code of social order, the bringing up of the children of the rich people was generally left to the cadre of the servants. Rabindranath was also brought up by the servants. Brajeshwar was the head of the servants who looked after him. Earlier, Brajeshwar was a pundit in a school. He was a bit serious type of man and somewhat greedy too. He would give less to eat to the children and the rest he would gobble himself. Rabindranath thus got the habit of eating less right from his childhood.

In spite of all his weaknesses, Brajeshwar did one good work to his credit. Regularly he would sit with the children in the evenings and recite the Krittivasa's Bengali *Ramayana*. Brajeshwar could not, however, read correctly. But, in that meeting of the small children, one such gentleman came, off and on, who had learnt all of the *Ramayana* by heart, and who could recite it without seeing the book. His name was Kishori Chatterjee. Rabindranath learnt the story of the *Ramayana* first of all from his mother, then from Brajeshwar and finally from Kishori Chatterjee.

Another servant who was appointed to look after Rabindranath was Shyam. Like Brajeshwar, he did not have a harsh temperament. He told one or the other story to Rabindranath everyday—sometimes a ghost story and sometimes a story about the dacoits. Out of the stories Shyam had told Rabindranath, he had liked most the stories of the dacoits Raghu and Bishu.

The robbers Raghu and Bishu warned the people beforehand and then they would go out to rob them. They did not rob anybody without giving prior intimation. Having heard their names, the people of the village got frightened. These robbers, however, considered it a sin to harm women. Rabindranath was so much interested in the stories of robbers that several times he arranged mock plays based on these stories at his house. When he grew old, he narrated these stories many a time to the students of Santiniketan.

## LESSONS OF MUSIC

Rabindranath had been taught music from a very young age. His music teacher was Shrikant Babu. Shrikant Babu could sing Hindi rhymes very well. Rabindranath had learnt many songs from him. By that time, harmonium was not in use. Rabindranath would put the noted Indian string instrument *tambura* on to his shoulder and practice music. His elder brother Jyotirindranath had also taught him many songs.

Would anyone believe that in childhood Rabindranath had learnt wrestling also from a wrestler? He had told the story of his prowess in wrestling several times to the people.

"At dawn we would get up from the bed and prepare ourselves for a wrestle. In the winter, the mornings were so cold that we would almost shiver. Kana, a wrestler taught us wrestling. A piece of land was lying vacant to the north of our drawing room. That place was called *Gola Bari*. We would store our grain for the whole year in *Gola Bari*. The paddy which we received from our ryots got deposited there. By the side of *Gola Bari* was our *akhara* or the wrestling enclosure. The *akhara* was dug about an arm deep and after thrashing the earth several times about a maund of mustard oil was added to it. We had learnt many facts from the wrestler."

## HUNTING EXPEDITION

In his young age Rabindranath went out for hunting also. His brother, Jyoti Babu, loved him the most. Jyoti Babu could shoot well. Once there was news that a tiger had come in the

jungle of Selidah. He got hold of his gun and strode out of his house. He took with him a good hunter, Vishwanath, and his younger brother, Rabindranath. He was of the opinion that Rabindranath would feel encouraged if he could accompany him on such occasions. He would be able to get over his fear. Jyoti Babu killed the tiger in the presence of Rabindranath.

Besides this, Rabindranath once went out for hunting with Jyoti Babu on an elephant. This time also, they hunted in the jungle of Selidah. As the cane crop had grown up on both sides of their way to the jungle, the elephant had a nice meal throughout. Having reached there, they saw a tiger. This tiger was perhaps more wily. They could not kill it.

Maharshi Devendranath, the father of Rabindranath, encouraged him in every work. He never refrained him from doing even the useless things. Once Rabindranath decided that he must go to Peshawar by a bullock-cart. He became very adamant. All the people in the house burst into laughter. Last of all, Rabindranath himself went to Maharshi and told his plan.

Having heard him the Maharshi said, "Oh, your idea is really excellent. How nice would it be to go to Peshawar by a bullock cart ! If you go by a railway train you cannot enjoy the beautiful scenery along both sides of the route." "With these observations, says Rabindranath, "he (Maharshi) proceeded to recount to me his own adventurous wanderings on foot and horse-back. Of any chance of discomfort or peril he had not a word to say."

Once Rabindranath collected small pieces of stones. Had there been anybody else he would have asked him to throw them at once. But, Maharshi was an altogether different man. He was rather pleased with the novel idea and said, "It's really fine. Where did you get these stones from ?" He replied, "I can bring thousands of stones like this." Maharshi said, "You should build a small hillock for me. I will sit on it and offer my prayers." And, Rabindranath, indeed, collected small stones and built a small hillock.

### TREK IN THE HIMALAYAS

Maharshi remained always busy in work. Even then, whenever he got time, he would sit besides Rabindranath and teach

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him. Once he took Rabindranath along with him to the Himalayas. While on their way to the Himalayas, they stayed at Amritsar. There, Rabindranath used to go regularly to the golden temple. "The golden temple of Amritsar comes back to me like a dream. Many a morning have I accompanied my father to this Gurudwara of the Sikhs in the middle of the lake. There the sacred chanting resounds continually. My father, seated amidst the throng of worshippers, would sometimes add his voice to the hymn of praise, and finding a stranger joining in their devotions they would wax enthusiastically cordial and he would return loaded with sanctified offerings of sugar crystals and other sweets." (*Reminiscences*, pp. 87-88). When he grew old, he made many poems based on the stories of the Sikhs.

While they were living in the Himalayas, Rabindranath had started learning Sanskrit from Maharshi. Maharshi regularly taught him the *Balmiki Ramayana* in Sanskrit. The days spent in the Himalayas were memorable days in the life of Rabindranath. The beautiful scenery of the heavenly Himalayas had enchanted the life and soul of Rabindranath. Seeing the scene of the sunrise on the snow-covered mountain peaks, the child Rabindranath would almost forget himself.

Similarly, the *Balmiki Ramayana* had inspired a new life in him. His mother, Brajeshwar, Kishori Chatterjee and others had already told him the story of the *Ramayana* in Bengali. This time he had got a new pleasure in the original Balmiki's *Ramayana*. By and by, he had learnt many portions of the *Ramayana* by heart. When he returned from the Himalayas, he recited the *Ramayana* in Sanskrit before all the people in the house. All of them were very much pleased. It gave such a pleasure to his mother that her eyes were filled with tears of joy.

The children of the Tagore family got their early education in the schools located in their out-house which was popularly known as *Chandi Mandap* or the Kutchery room. All the children of Tagore House studied in that school. Besides this, the children of the neighbours also came there for studies. First of all, the teacher would write the alphabets on palm leaves. The students would then move their hands on the letters copying exactly as the teacher wrote. Rabindranath had also learnt letters in this school by writing on palm leaves.



## THE TRUANT

Rabindranath was sent to a regular school when he was five years of age. In the beginning, he was fond of going to school. But, after some time, he had lost all interest in it. He did not like to sit in the closed class-room. Instead, he liked to walk on the grass, in the open ground, under the green trees. He hated going to school so much that he felt out of sorts when he was asked to get ready for the school. Neither he liked his teacher nor their way of teaching. The people in the house felt that Rabindranath would not probably study further.

The closed class-rooms of the school did not appeal to Rabindranath. The tables and chairs in the class room looked to him like ghosts. As soon as he entered the class-room, he felt suffocated. Whenever, he got time, he would escape from the school and play truant. He liked to roam about and play in the open air. He wanted to see trees, plants and beautiful flowers all around. The chirping of birds and their flitting in the sky gave him immense pleasure. The child Rabindranath wanted that the teachers should be kind to the pupils. As against that, he saw harsh behaviour of the teachers who laid more stress on books. They wanted that the students should learn blindly whatever was written in their books. The teacher would teach the students just as the machine works. There was no sweetness in this way of teaching. The children had no interest in learning or understanding their lessons. At times, not only did Rabindranath feel restless in the school but he got very much frightened also.

Rabindranath could never forget those days. That was why when he grew old, the first thing he did was that he established a school of his own choice. With only five students, he opened his school at Santiniketan, Bolpur, a village near Calcutta. Had Rabindranath not been famous as a poet, this famous school at Santiniketan alone would have made him popular throughout the world.

When all the people in the house had left the hope of Rabindranath's studying further, his brother, Jyoti Babu, took upon himself the burden of teaching him. Jyoti Babu had great patience in him. Whatever Rabindranath saw he would put a

question on it. He would ask 'how' and 'why' about everything in the world.

Jyoti Babu would reply to all the questions of his brother. Whenever they went out for a walk, Rabindranath always followed his brother. Jyoti Babu could not get rid of his brother simply by replying to his questions; he had to listen to everything he said. Rabindranath would make poems and read them to his brother. At times, Jyoti Babu was so much impressed by his brother that he included some of his poems in his own books.

Jyoti Babu had understood it well that Rabindranath was fed up with the suffocating atmosphere of the school. He would therefore take him to different villages of Bengal. There for the first time, Rabindranath saw Nature at its best. In the green countryside, he would heave a sigh of relief. The invigorating open air of the village and the sweet smell of the earth would allure him. He started writing poems. In doing so, Rabindranath drew inspiration from his brother, Jyoti Babu, whenever he went along with him to the village. He was so much charmed by the village life that he could not forget it throughout his life. That was why when he grew old, he left the city and lived in the village. The life in the village and the contact with Nature so stirred the soul of Rabindranath that like Wordsworth and Tennyson, he ultimately chose to be a poet of the Nature.

The impact of Vaishnava philosophy on Bengali literature is too well known to merit a detailed description. It can in fact be said that modern Bengali literature is what it has been largely because of the Vaishnava lyricists. Bengali literature flourished during the last few hundred years due to the deeply devotional lyrics written by the Vaishnava monks centring round the life and philosophy of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the renowned Vaishnava Saint.

No modern Bengali literature could be left uninfluenced by the ripple that was smoothly flowing in the stream of thought of Jaideva, Vidyapati and Chandidas. Their devotional songs reached the hamlets in the interior of Bengal. The ploughman in the field, the monk in the street, the feudal lord in his mansion, all joined in the chorus and they sang in the glory of universal brotherhood of man. 'Love' was all the word in their new dictionary; that explained in substance the philosophy of the entire movement. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the pioneers of modern Bengali literature, although influenced mainly by Western thoughts, could not avoid the Vaishnavite influence. Bankim wrote long literary pieces in praise of Vidyapati and Jaideva. Madhusudan wrote *Brajangana Kabya*. When Rabindranath loomed on the literary scene he appeared not as a reformist or patriotic poet. His debut was as a Vaishnava lyricist.

It was indeed an interesting story.

## SRI CHAITANYA

It was during the sixteenth century that the sappling of Bengali literature sprouted and spread. The most important role played in this development was by the Vaishnava lyricists whose main theme was to sing in the glory of Lord Chaitanya whom India and particularly Bengal accepted as the incarnation of the united pair—Radha and Krishna. In this great literary movement, particular mention may be made of poets like Jnanadas, Govindadas, Balaramadas, Narottamdas. Among them, Jnanadas was perhaps the most powerful. To him 'any mention of Shyam (Krishna) swells my heart with joy.'

Rabindranath had read these *Vaishnava padavalis*, as they were commonly known. *Prachin Kavya Samgraha* was then a popular journal. And it frequently carried features on and reproductions of Vaishnava lyricists. Rabindranath was a regular reader of the journal and through this he had his first introduction to the Vaishnava poets. It seems his favourite poets were Vidyapati, Chandidas, Jayadeva and Govindadas about whom he was keen to know in details. Although Jayadeva wrote in Sanskritised Bengali, some scholars classified his work under Sanskrit literature. Rabindranath's early acquaintance with Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidas were marked by sweet, secret stealthy adventures, just like the subject matter of these master poets—the secret romance between Radha and Krishna. These will be discussed in brief.

## VIDYAPATI

Chaitanya was spreading his message of universal brotherhood of man in the sixteenth century. Just two centuries before Chaitanya we had the great Vaishnava lyricist Chandidas. Chandidas' place in Bengali literature can be compared with that of Geoffrey Chaucer in English literature. "Chandidas did for Bengali something of the service which Chaucer, his older contemporary did for English and Dante for Italian." His poems centred round the romance between Radha and Krishna. He was followed by Vidyapati. The followers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu too composed poems in Vidyapati's style. The



later poets composed in their own style. But Rabindranath could not appreciate them much. He went back to Vidyapati. "I found in the Vaishnava poets lyrical movement; and images startling and new" he commented. Rabindranath revolted against the nineteenth century Bengali poets. He thought, "they introduced nothing new; their forms were the same old monotonous metre. But in the Vaishnava poets language was fluid, verse could sing."

Rabindranath started imitating Vidyapati who composed verses in *Maithili*. Rabindranath published them under a pseudo name—Bhanu Singh, a literal translation of his own name. It was stated there that the manuscript of Bhanu Singh, supposedly an early Vaishnava lyricist had just been discovered. Describing these "adventures" Rabindranath described much later, "To my friend mentioned a while ago (i.e., Akshay Chowdhury) I said one day 'A tattered old manuscript has been discovered while rummaging in the *Adi Brahma Samaj* library and from this I have copied some poems by an old Vaishnava poet named Bhanu Sinha;' with which I read some of my imitation poems to him. He was profoundly stirred. 'These could not have been written even by Vidyapati or Chandidas!' he rapturously exclaimed. 'I really must have that manuscript to make over to Akshay Babu for publication'."

Then I showed him my manuscript book and conclusively proved that the poems could not have been written by either Vidyapati or Chandidas because the author happened to be myself. My friend's face fell as he muttered 'yes, yes, they are not half bad'."

The verses were all written in *Maithili*. The imitation was so perfect that even the ardent Vaishnava enthusiasts were deceived. A student of Vaishnava literature, one Nishikanta Chatterjee submitted his thesis to a German University on *Vaishnava* poetry quoting extensively from "the ancient *Vaishnava* poet" Bhanu Singh. He was awarded a doctorate!

Expressing his gratitude to the Vaishnava poets Rabindranath observed, "I am so grateful that I got to know them when I did. They gave me form. They made many experiments in metre. And then there was the boldness of their imagery."

This boldness of the *Vaishnava* poets' imagery captivated

the poet. The budding poet found his ideal. There was a slight deviation from the ordinary track. Acknowledging his gratitude to the *Vaishnava* poets, Rabindranath recorded at another place, "if you ask what gave me boldness when I was young, I should say that one thing was my early acquaintance with the old *Vaishnava* poets of Bengal, full of freedom in metre and expression. I think I was only twelve when these poems first began to be reprinted . . . I surreptitiously obtained copies from the desks of my elders. For the edification of the young I must confess that this was not right for a boy of my age. I should have been passing my examinations and not following a path that would lead to failure. I must also admit that the greater part of these lyrics was erotic and not quite suited to a boy just about to reach his teens, but my imagination was completely occupied with the beauty of their forms and the music of their words and their breath, heavily laden with voluptuousness passed over my mind without distracting it."

Besides Chandidas and Vidyapati, there were the works of Jayadeva which fell in the poet's hand.

## JAYADEVA

Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* used to be recited by the poet's brother. "The music, the symbolism, the intense spiritual yearning, the interpenetration of human feelings with the beauties of nature" of the *Vaishnava* literature fascinated the poet from his childhood.

Rabindranath lived for some time on the Ganga with his father Maharshi Devendranath. There one day, by chance a copy of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* in Bengali letters published from the Fort William, Calcutta fell into the child's hands. Rabindranath has recorded about this new 'discovery' in his *Reminiscences* in the following words:

"Another time I had accompanied my father on a trip on the Ganges in his houseboat. Among the books he had with him was an old Fort William edition of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. It was in the Bengali character. The verses were not printed in separate lines, but ran on like prose. I did not then know anything of Sanskrit, yet because of my knowledge of Bengali many

of the words were familiar. I cannot tell how often I read that *Gita Govinda*."

Jayadeva's famous line "*Nibhrita-nikunja-griham-gataya nishi rahasi niliya basantang*" captivated the young Rabindranath's mind both for the words and the metre. Wrote Rabindranath, "I had to discover for myself the intricate metre of Jayadeva, because its divisions were lost in the clumsy prose form of the book. And this discovery gave me very great delight." This was not the age for boy Rabindranath to understand Jayadeva but the curiosity of the child poet goaded him to enjoy the great Vaishnava poet. Rabindranath himself admitted it, "Of course I did not fully comprehend Jayadeva's meaning. It would hardly be correct to aver that I had got it even partly. But the sound of the words and the lilt of the metre filled my mind with pictures of wonderful beauty, which impelled me to copy out the whole of the book for my own use."

Although Jayadeva influenced Rabindranath greatly, the influence of Vidyapati was perhaps greater. According to the great scholar and author Annada Sankar Ray, "After Kalidasa, Vidyapati seems to have most influenced Rabindranath Tagore." According to him 'these three great Indian poets' were in the same tradition though their languages differed. The natural beauty of India, the seasons with their characteristic flora, their birds and beasts, their clouds and zephyrs, their sunshine and moonlight and rain permeated deeply the creations of all the three.

## INDIRECT CONTACTS

Besides his direct contact with the works of Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Chandidas, Govindadas and other Vaishnava lyricists, there were a few other factors that brought Rabindranath nearer to *Vaishnavism*. He read Michael's *Brajangana Kavya*, Bankim Chandra's learned articles on *Vaishnava* lyricists. Rabindranath's idol poet Beharilal Chakravarty was much inspired by the *Vaishnava* philosophy. And above all Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of the *Renaissance* movement in India and the Brahmo Samaj movement derived much inspiration from Vaishnava philosophy. Rabindranath, as it is well known to all, was brought

up in the atmosphere of the Brahmo movement. According to Dr. S.N. Das Gupta, "The most important contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the revival of the Vaishnava conception of God on the Upanishadic basis." Besides this, child Rabindranath had the privilege of listening regularly to the melodious voice of the family friend Sri Kantha Sinha. It has also been recorded that Rabindranath had learnt many Vaishnava songs from Sri Kantha Babu about whose voice he was very generous in description in his *Reminiscences*. Rabindranath has narrated how enthusiastically his music teacher taught him these Vaishnava songs. Rabindranath noted, "In singing I was Sri Kantha Babu's favourite pupil. He had taught me a song: 'No more for Vraja (Krishna's playground) for me' and would drag me about to every one's rooms and get me to sing it to them. I would sing and he would thrum an accompaniment on his *Sitar* and when we came to the chorus he would join in, and repeat it over and over again, smiling and nodding his head at each one in turn, as if nudging them on to a more enthusiastic appreciation." This great music teacher, it may incidentally be mentioned, died with a Vaishnava song on his lips.

### TAGORE'S PADAVALIS

In the introduction of *Bhanu Sinher Padavalis*, Rabindranath has recorded how he came in contact with Vaishnava literature. He acknowledged his debt to the late Mr. Akshoy Chandra Sarkar who was publishing the Vaishnava verses serially. There, he has particularly mentioned how he used to be enchanted by the melody of the verses *Brajabuli*.

The poet was hardly twelve when he came in contact with the Vaishnava lyricists. He used to read them stealthily. He got the volumes from the desk of his elder brother who hardly read them. Rabindranath enjoyed them thoroughly, analysed them, made notes of the new words and got them by heart. His note book on the Vaishnava lyricists was of great help to Kaliprasanna Kavyavisharad when the latter brought out a collection of the works of Vidyapati with explanatory notes.

A keen student of the old Vaishnava poems (to quote his own words about himself) Rabindranath discovered a 'treasure



house.' It was a new world of mystery. In his own words, "My feeling towards them was that same eager curiosity with which I regarded the ungerminated sprout within the seed, or the undiscovered mystery under the dust covering the earth. My enthusiasm was kept up with the hope of bringing to light some unknown poetical gems, as I went deeper and deeper into the unexplored darkness of this treasure house."

There were twenty verses composed in the style of Vidyapati. Each one can be sung in the *Kirtana* style. The first song he wrote was:

*Gahana kusuma kunja majhe  
Mridula madhura bansi baje.*

In *Bhanu Sinher Padavali* this was the eighth song. The secret love of Radha for Krishna has been the main theme of all the songs. The Bhanu Singh lyrics, "sort and arrange, in as many ways as the poet can think of, the old themes of the Vaishnava singers—the unkindness and neglect of Krishna, the sorrow of deserted Radha, flowers, flutes in the forest, the women going to tryst in heavy rain. All the time Bhanu Singh chides or consoles or advises the disconsolate Radha."

Rabindranath has not assigned great importance to these lyrics in his literary career. He has written, "Any attempt to test Bhanu Singh's poetry by its ring would have shown up the base metal. It had none of the ravishing melody of our ancient pipes, but only the tinkle of a modern foreign barrel organ." The poet has rather been unkind to his earlier compositions. All these *Padavalis* have been turned in the *Kirtana* style and *Bhanu Sinher Padavali* will always occupy a permanent place in the history of Bengali literature.

Vaishnavism was the theme of his many other literary pieces where he preached non-violence. It would be interesting to note that Rabindranath, liberal as he was in his attitude to different sects of Indian philosophy drew inspiration from the *Upanishads*, the teaching of the Buddha and the Vaishnavas but he never wrote anything in praise of the *Sakta* sect. There was direct evidence to show the influence of Vaishnavism even in

some of his novels and dramas. To cite a single instance, the novel "The Saint King" (or *Rajarshi*) preaches non-violence. It mainly centred round the character of a King who forbade sacrifice before the Goddess of War. With the same characters and plot he wrote the drama *Sacrifice* (or *Bisarjan*). This great love for non-violence at his early age could be ascribed to the Vaishnava influence. That these two literary pieces mirrored the greatness of the Vaishnava philosophy cannot be questioned. Narrating the origin of the plots Rabindranath has noted, "I wanted a serial for *Balak*, and was thinking about one. I was going to visit Ramnarayan Basu. The train was crowded, and an Englishman wouldn't allow the lamp to be hidden, so it burnt brightly all night and I couldn't sleep. But I dozed and dreamt of a father and a girl before a temple. Blood was running out over the steps, and the girl was deeply pained. 'Why is this blood? Why is this blood?' She kept asking, and tried to wipe it away. Her father was very troubled, and couldn't answer her, so tried to silence her, really to silence his own mind. I woke up, and determined to put this in my story. And I used also the story of the Raja of Tripura, who introduced *Vaishnavism* into his State and was banished by his brother."

This has been only one of many instances.

## HUMANISM

In his later life when Rabindranath came in contact with people from different countries he could accept and embrace them as friends and near kith and kin because he believed only in one religion—humanism. This great philosophy of his life was certainly built upon the Vaishnava lyricist who sang centuries ago

*Shuno ray manush bhai*  
*Sabar uparey manush Satya*  
*Tahar uparey nai (Chandidas)*  
 (Listen, brother men,  
 Man is the highest Truth,  
 Non is higher than he)

We find the reflection of this thought in innumerable pieces of Rabindranath. Singing to the glory of the Universal Man Rabindranath has recorded how he searched and searched a house when he had houses in every corner of the globe.

### SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

In his personal life too the poet got much relief and consolation in the sweet spirit of the Vaishnava poems.

Rabindranath was much inspired by his sister-in-law—Jyotirindranath's wife, Kadambari Devi—to whom he dedicated the Vaishnava lyrics. Unfortunately this great lady died in 1885 at a very early age. This death of a loving friend created a vacuum in the poet's mind. He found great consolation and relief in the Vaishnava lyrics. An eminent scholar of Tagore literature Dr. Sukumar Sen has recorded, "*The Vaishnava* lyrics now (i.e., after the death of Mrs. Kadambari Tagore in 1885) acquired a new spiritual significance for him. Radha of Vaishnava poetry is Man (that is his own Self) and Krishna the unobtainable fulfilment of Man's (i.e., his) desire. Between the two there is an impassable gulf of separation but there is also a sure promise that the two will meet ultimately when the cycle of creation is completed." It was from the teachings of Vidyapati, Chandidas and the earlier Vaishnava poets that the grief stricken poet learnt to "look upon Nature not only as companionable or friendly but also as the manifestation of the eternity of the Universe (i.e., Brahman) and upon man as an integral part of Nature."

### SRI AUROBINDO ON TAGORE

The spirit of Vaishnava poetry permeate throughout the works of the poet consciously or unconsciously. In spite of this acquaintance with varied schools of thought, the poet could not escape this influence. In a brilliant analysis of the Poetry of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo observed, "One of the most remarkable peculiarities of Rabindranath's genius is the happiness and originality with which he has the whole spirit of Vaishnava poetry and turned it into something essentially the same and yet new

and modern. He had given the old sweet spirit of emotional and passionate religion an expression of more delicate and complex richness, a voice full of subtler and more penetratingly spiritual shades of feeling than the deep-hearted but simple early age, Bengal could know. The old Vaishnava *bhava*—there is no English word for it—was easily seizable, broad and strong.” Can there be a better analysis of Rabindranath’s philosophy than this short, lucid one?



Tagore was influenced more by Buddha than by any other philosopher or saint. In his personal life Tagore lent his support to the Brahmo Samaj. He delved deep into the Upanishads. And in his heart of hearts he worshipped Buddha "the giver of immortal gifts." To Buddha, Tagore constantly prayed: "Give us the power of renunciation and claim from us our pride."

It was to Buddha, the "Serene," and the "Free," that Tagore looked for peace amidst global wrangles

Tagore's monumental works have two distinct imprints. The influence by the Upanishads and the impact of teachings of Buddha. In his memoirs Tagore has narrated how his father used to make him recite verses from the Upanishads in the chilly winter dawns at Dalhousie. Tagore himself related how the teachings of Buddha had inspired most of his monumental works.

In his preface to "The Realisation of Life", Tagore wrote: "To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the Spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality."

## WORLD WORKER

Humanity is struggling from the early dawn of civilisation to attain perfection. Tagore explicitly maintained—like Buddha—that to attain this perfection one should try to attain union with a Being whose activity is world-wide and who dwells in the heart of humanity. This, Tagore maintained in his *Religion of Man*, cannot be *passive*. It was here that Tagore pleaded for "World Worker" who would work for all. All work that is good, however small in extent, would be universal in character. It was here that one could see Tagore preaching the doctrine of Gautama Buddha. This was the motto of Tagore's life. This principle of "World Worker" was the first brick upon which the mighty edifice of Santiniketan—dream of Tagore's life—stands. Students of literature of today and unborn tomorrows will ever pause for a while to ponder over the simple question that followed as a logical corollary—was Tagore a Buddhist *par excellence*?

Tagore tried to understand Buddha. He was, in fact, inspired by Buddha. His spiritual union was inspired by Buddha's *Brahmavihara*. Buddha said, "Do not deceive each other, do not despise anybody anywhere, never in anger wish anyone to suffer through your body, words or thoughts. Like a *mother* maintaining her only son with her own life keep thy immeasurable loving thought for all creatures."

"Above thee, below thee, on all sides of thee keep on all the world thy sympathy and immeasurable loving thought which is without obstruction, without any wish to injure, without enmity."

"To be dwelling in such contemplation while standing, walking, sitting or lying down, until sleep overcomes thee, is called living in Brahma."

## SONG OF LOVE

This description of *Brahmavihara* was the keynote that turned Tagore into a great humanist. This idea had its finest treatment in *Natir Puja*, *Abhisar*, *Pujarini*, *Chandalika*, *Shyama*

and series of speeches delivered by the poet as the *Acharya* at Santiniketan.

The song to the glory of human love rather than any supernatural mystic spirit touched his sensitive mind and lingered till his last days.

Tagore adored Buddha because "Buddha's idea of the infinite was not the idea of a spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity but the infinite whose meaning is in the positive ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human." This lofty idea had its expression in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda who found "Shiva" (Beauty and Truth Personified) in every "Jeeva" (creature). This theory of love for humanity was put to experiment later on by Gandhiji in the vast global laboratory.

This doctrine of love has been the most significant contribution that India has to offer to the world. It had its echo for a distant mountain five hundred years later. Twentyfour hundred years later India turned a nest of singing birds who joined the concert—Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Gandhi. Tagore was the nightingale of the night. In almost all the songs in glory to Man, the *weltanschauung* was the deepest love for Man and his civilisation. That reflected the Buddha in Tagore.

An analytical study of this great mind would reveal clearly how he appreciated the beauty in every creature. If Tagore could be explained in one word, perhaps it would be his humanism. Sometimes Tagore himself sang deep in his appreciation of human life and turned mystic who do not remember his great desire "not to leave this beautiful world and its human beings?"

## NIRVANA

Tagore found "salvation" not in any sort of renunciation. He preferred and recommended service to humanity as a better source of salvation. "By being charitable, good and loving, you do not realise the infinite in the stars and rocks but the infinite revealed in Man." Buddha's teaching pointed to *Nirvana* as the highest end. To understand its real character, observed

Tagore in his famous "Religion of Man", we have to know the path of its attainment, which would be not merely through the negation of evil thoughts and deeds but through the elimination of limits to love. It must mean the sublimation of Self, in a truth which would be love itself, which unite in its bosom all those to whom we must offer our sympathy and service.

The inner current of thought happily blended with Buddhist doctrine flowed silently throughout Tagore's works. The poet has exclusively dedicated his thought to the popularisation of this novel mission in some of his popular plays and playlets e.g., *Shyama*, *Natir Puja*, *Chandalika* etc. Some of the oft quoted poems, e.g., *Pujarini*, *Abhisar*, *Srestha Bhiksha* dealt entirely with Buddhist anecdotes and Buddha's sermons.

In *Shyama*, Tagore presented an interlocutory playlet centring round the reason why Buddha abandoned his faithful wife Yasodhara. The poet adapted the original story from the Sanskrit Buddhist literature published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1882.

## NONE UNTOUCHABLE

In *Chandalika* Tagore narrated the story of Anand, the favourite disciple of the Master. It was based upon the story of love between Ananda and Prakriti, an untouchable girl. Buddha was at Sravasti. Ananda one day felt thirsty. He asked for some water. Prakriti refused to oblige, for she thought herself too 'low'. Ananda convinced Prakriti that no human being could be an untouchable. He drank water from her hands. Prakriti fell in love with Ananda. By her mother's charms Prakriti brought Ananda before her. Ananda's serene presence changed her mind miraculously. Prakriti turned a devotee of the Master. It was a playlet in glory of purity, self-discipline, sympathy, forgiveness and uplift of the downtrodden.

In *Natir Puja*, Tagore sang to the glory of Buddha. Maharaja Bimbisar of Magadh turned a Buddhist. His son Ajatasatru, an orthodox Hindu, turned hostile. Bimbisar left the kingdom and turned a monk. Ajatasatru sat on the throne with a cruel rod against Buddhists. The dancing girl of the royal court, Sri-mati, lived in the palace. She was a staunch devotee of Buddha.



She was ordered to be slain. She danced before the altar of Buddha, putting on a nun's dress. But she was slain. This left a deep impression in the mind of Ajatasatru, the King and Queen Mother Lokeswari, who all turned devotees of Buddha. In *Natir Puja* Tagore painted a vivid picture of devotion personified.

### NOBLEST ALMS

In another poem Tagore narrated how a beggar woman offered her tribute to Buddha. Disciple Anathapinda went round for alms. Many came with costly gifts. The beggar woman had nothing but a torn piece of cloth. She hid herself behind a tree and gave her last 'wealth' to Buddha. Anathapinda accepted it as the noblest alms and carried it to the Master.

In *Abhisar*, Buddhist monk Upagupta served ill-fated Basavadatta, once the beauty of the city. Here Tagore recounted that real service to humanity would be only to come to relief of the distressed, the helpless and the unfortunate, forsaken by all.

In his life-long search for Truth, Tagore did not forget for a moment "the prince who leaves his crown to explore Reality." One has been reminded of Buddha's search for Truth time and again in Tagore's *Ebar Phirao Morey*.

Tagore never believed in any compromise with untruth. Buddha said in the *Dhammapada*, "They who fear when they ought not to fear, and fear not when they ought to fear such men embracing false doctrines enter the evil path." Tagore said in his famous poem *Natibedya*:

"Burn him by your despise like a straw, O Lord  
Who commits unjust work  
And also who yields to injustice."

### ELEMENT OF TIME

The famous sermon of Buddha on the eternal element of time, seemed to have influenced Tagore's *Kshanika*. Buddha said, "Concentrate on religion, my friend, leave not the element of time. Those who do not pay heed to the element of time are grief-stricken. They undergo the suffering of hell."

A similar thought was expressed by Rabindranath throughout his *Kshanika*.

The above were only some instances to show the tremendous influence of Buddha on Tagore. It was a silver lining in the dark cloud of the world that Tagore came to sing the songs first uttered by Buddha more than 2500 years ago. Perhaps the need was never greater for reiteration of faith in Man than today when

"Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest  
With the poison of self-seeking  
With a thirst that knows no end."

With Tagore we pray to that "Serene" that "Free" to

"Touch them with thy right hand  
make them one in spirit,  
bring rhythm of beauty."

"O Serene, O Free  
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness  
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth."

Tagore and Buddha's warning against conflict and hatred are still relevant. Their roles cannot be challenged even by posterity.

It was Schopenhauer who observed "we may divide thinkers into those who think for themselves and those who think through others. The latter are the rule and the former the exception. The first are original thinkers in a double sense, and egoists in the noblest meaning of the word. It is from them only that the world learns wisdom. For, only the light which we have kindled in ourselves can illuminate others."

In this original thinking one can find the reflections of great predecessors. Nobody can challenge the originality in Tagore's works. Versatile genius that he was, he had plenty to offer to the universe. If one analyses his works patiently one could find, next to Upanishads and Buddha's teachings, the thoughts that influenced him most were the works of his unseen preceptor, the great Kalidas.

In his innumerable poems, essays and speeches, Gurudev acknowledged his deep gratitude to Kalidas. In his *Jiban Smriti* (Memoirs) Rabindranath recollected how the recitations from Kalidas's *Meghadut* during the rainy days attracted and impressed him. He could not follow the lines but the words, the sheer rhetoric left a permanent imprint in his mind. Later, he got hold of a copy of *Kumar Sambhava* and recited some stanzas himself. He particularly liked the two words *Mandakininirjhara-nikara* and *Kampitodebadaru* which literally "stole his heart."

Prof. Thomson, Tagore's Western biographer, also gives a similar story about the poet's early childhood and the influence

of Kalidas. He has noted: "As stray lines from the *Gita Govinda* (by Jaidev or the *Claud Messenger* (*Meghadut* by Kalidas) on the child's hearing, imagination could take of the things that had been seen and by them conjure up the Sanskrit poet's picture."

By this time Rabindranath had already started composing verses himself. Consciously or sub-consciously the influence of the master poet could be discerned throughout Rabindranath's literary career. He drew his inspiration from Kalidas as Dante had drawn from Virgil or Spenser from Chaucer. In the words of Prof. Thomson, "As Dante looked across the centuries and hailed Virgil as master, as Spenser overlooked two hundred years of poetical tumbling and claimed the succession to Chaucer, as Milton in his turn saluted his master Spenser, so Rabindranath turned back to Kalidas."

Both Kalidas and Rabindranath had certain common linkings. Both, for instance, had great respect and liking for the Himalayas. Kalidas started his *Kumar Sambhava* after paying respect to *Devatatma Himalaya*, the Nagadhiraj, Rabindranath remember the *Dhyana gambhir bhudhar the Himalaya*. The Himalayas have been beautifully described by Kalidas on several occasions. "Dark clouds wandering round the mountain zone cast cool shadows dear to the sylphs till they sought eternal sunshine on each loftier peak being frightened by the storm and rain." But Rabindranath's love for the Himalayas could perhaps be attributed to the influence of his father, Maharshi Devendranath, who "was a great wanderer with deepest love for the Himalayas."

## ETERNAL LOVE

In 1889, Tagore wrote *Manasi*. It contained certain poems where the poet wanted to say that human love was something eternal. It transcends beyond life. A man can meet his beloved even in the next life. This was because real love never perished. Just like human soul, real love could also be eternal. This idea seemed to have come to Tagore after he had gone through Kalidas minutely. He was 28 then and had attained considerable maturity.



The Indian scriptures also influenced him. To establish his theory of eternal love, he found similar thoughts in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*. These ideas have been expressed in the two poems particularly — *Purbakale* and *Ananta Prem* (Eternal Love).

It would be interesting to note that a few Western poets too believed in eternal love, "that hath no beginning hath no end." Shelley, for instance, maintained: "There is no death, nor change."

Rabindranath expressed similar thoughts in innumerable poems and other works. In the same poem Rabindranath noted:

I have ever loved thee in a  
 hundred forms and times  
 Age after age, in birth following  
 birth.  
 The chain of songs that my fond  
 heart did weave  
 Thou graciously didst take  
 around the neck,  
 Age after age, in birth following  
 birth.

The last line echoed the words of Kalidas—*Bhavathhirani Jananantara-Souhridani*. This eternal love 'that hath no beginning, no end,' for which 'there is no death or change' found expression in the works of both the masters. It reminded the reader at once of Dushyanta's love for Shakuntala at first sight.

In the same poem Rabindranath observed:

When I listen to the tales of the  
 primitive past,  
 The love-pangs of the far distant  
 times,  
 The meetings and partings of  
 the ancient ages,  
 I see thy form gathering light  
 Through the dark dimness of  
 Eternity

And appearing as a star ever  
fixed in the memory of all.

## LOVE FOR NATURE

Next to the theory of 'eternal love' the common bond that bound the two master poets has been love for Nature. Both were great worshippers of Nature. In *Shakuntala* we find the heroine bidding good-bye not only to the inmates of the *Ashram* and the deer etc., but also to the plants whom she used to water regularly. The master playwright treated the plants as living beings. His favourite trees and plants were *Devdaru*, *Ashoka*, *Arjuna*, *Sallaki*, *Kadamba*, *Kimsuka*, *Bakula*, *Kandali*. Tagore's favourite trees and plants were *Simul*, *Palas*, *Devdaru*, *Kimsuka*, *Chhatim* *Shephalika*, *Sal*. To him too, the plants and trees were living companions of human beings.

In another poem *Tapoban*, Tagore has given a vivid description of a forest *ashram* of his liking. Critics of literature are tempted to compare the poem with Kalidasa's description of *Tapoban* in *Raghubansa* or *Shakuntala*. A great authority on Tagore's life, Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee observed that the description of *Tapoban* by Kalidas impressed Rabindranath so much that the poet founded the *Bramhacharyashram* at Santiniketan as a replica of Kalidas's *Tapoban*. Till today, the atmosphere in this World University of India has been kept intact.

Rabindranath was certainly influenced by the realistic description of rains by Kalidas. In Kalidas's description, "The rainy season is conspicuous with dark clouds rumbling with thunder and dazzling with lightning and hanging low with the weight of water." Any of the songs of Rabindranath on rain or rains-welcome (*Varsa Mangal*) can be compared with Kalidas'.

Rabindranath wrote:

That day who knows what  
congregated cloud  
What lightning-festival, what  
thunders loud,  
What maddened race of tempest  
gathered o'er  
Ujjain's proud palace crests !

The dreadful roar of struggling clouds remind the poet of the first day of rains when Kalidas wrote his immortal *Meghadut*. Rabindranath wrote:

Today the sky is dark, with  
pouring rain.  
A dire wind sweeps beneath its  
dreadful flail,  
With lifted ribs the clouds, it  
peeps and peers.  
Hurling through empty space its  
crooked spears of sharp-edged  
laughter.  
In my closed dim room  
I read the *Meghadut*; on the  
cloudrack's spume  
My mind, in freedom wandering  
far from home,  
Is flying from land to land.

Even a happy man became unmindful when he saw the clouds in the sky, observed Kalidas. We only hear an echo of the same in Rabindranath's *Season Festival (Ritu-Utsava)* and other poems. In his *Sesher Kabita* Rabindranath revealed the 'mental agony' to express something to the beloved at the presence of cloud.

## MEGHADUT

Rabindranath referred to Kalidas's *Meghadut* not only in his poems but also in his essays and novels. He wrote a long article on *Meghadut* which later was published in his book *Prachin Sahitya*. That he was much inspired by this masterpiece of Kalidas can be appreciated when we go through the repeated references to it in *Lipika*, *Pumascha*, *Paschini Yatrir Diary* beside his one long poem and a short one on the subject and the long article in *Prachin Sahitya*.

In the long poem on *Meghadut* the description were so vivid and so similar to Kalidas's style that the reader would be simply captivated by it. The eminent critic of Tagore literature, Dr. Charu Chandra Bandyopadhyay, observed in *Rabi Rashmi* that in *Meghadut* Rabindranath very successfully "created such an atmosphere that the reader is taken back to the days of Kalidas."

The annual festival of the clouds and Nature has been described most vividly in words of the master poet. It has no parallel in the history of world literature.

In *Chaitali* Rabindranath wrote: suddenly God's curse descended from on high

Hurling its thunderbolt separation  
 Upon the boundless detachment of youth's egotism,  
 The season's ministry in a moment was ended  
     when the veil was wrenched from love's isolation,  
 And on the tear-misted sky appeared the pageantry  
 Of the rainy world of June  
 Across which journeyed the sad notes of your bereaved  
     heart  
 Toward a distant dream.

In his long poem *Meghadut* in *Manasi* Rabindranath asks: Did those, in separation from their beloved, with their folded hands, sing in chorus the songs of separation looking towards the house of their dear ones? Free from bondage, seated on the wings of new clouds, did they want to send their errand to their beloved lying on the floor with untied hair, with melancholy face with tears in their eyes?

He observed Kalidas's *Meghadut* expressing their pang must have reached them in countries, far and near. "Just like *Janhavi* of the month of *Shravan* carries all water to the sea, did you send, unhesitatingly, the tears of the beloved?"

The poet noted, several years passed, but every year has left a new mark of the remembrance of the first day of *Asharh*—the day of separation of the beloved! Several beloveds, tired of unbearable separation, shed silent tears in their eyes remembering their dear ones.



The poet, sitting all alone in his room, in Bengal, while Jaidev's description of the clouds, described so vividly, was peeping into his inner vision, compared *Meghadut* with the Jaidev verses of clouds of Bengal. He wrote:

At India's eastern end  
I sit today, where in our green Bengal  
Once, on a day of heavy shower's downfall,  
The poet Jaidev saw, at edge  
Of the world's rim, the emerald shadows fledge  
The tamal-jungle, and the sky's skirt filled  
With vapours.

In another poem in *Chaitali* Tagore offered an explanation for Kalidas's unfinished work—*Kumar Sambhava*. The poet observed:

"When the poet (Kalidas) chanted sidh song of the war-god's birth to the two deities, the ghost world stood round, the slow peaceful clouds of evening descended on his head, the lightning-play ceased, the thunder was silent, the young war-god's peacock stood motineless besides Parvati, with tail depressed, bending its arched neck. Sometimes the lips of the goddess grew tremulous with soft laughter, sometimes a long sigh breathed unnoted, sometimes the swelling tears showed in her eyes. Finally, a troubled shame silently descended on her eyes—you, O poet, looking into the goddess's eyes suddenly ended, with song unfinished."

## SPRING

Tagore's different dance-dramas centring round the beauty of Nature in different seasons clearly mirrored the poet's original thoughts and his keen appreciation of Nature. But when one peruses the descriptions of the seasons by both Rabindranath and Kalidas, one would be pleasantly surprised at the close similarity in their thoughts.

Next to rain, the spring had attracted both the master minds.

Kalidas wrote: "The spring comes with young mango blossoms and swarms of bees. Everything gains added beauty in this season. Trees put forth flowers, waters grow lotuses, winds blow fragrant, evenings are pleasant and days delightful. The *Priyala* and *Kimsuka* flower and the *aiemukta* creeper puts on a new robe of blossoms in this season."

And Rabindranath penned:

Once again returns the day of festival,  
With spring's lavish honour,  
The branches at the poet's balcony  
Fill the basket of a new birthday  
... the invitation of the flowering *palash*.  
In *vasant-bahar* I want to sing.

For *Kimsuka* Tagore substituted *palash*, both meaning the same. Both described at innumerable places the characteristic features of the spring: the southern wind, the splendour of *Madhabi* flowers, the sweet songs of cuckoo. Both assigned a high place to the natural sweetness of the spring months—the *Madhumasa* or the "honey months".

Tagore wrote:

Spring that in my courtyard used to make  
Such riot once, and buzzing laughter lift,  
Pomegranate flowers  
*Kanchan*, *parul*, rain of *palash*—showers, etc.

That Tagore took Kalidas as his ideal cannot be denied. In one of the poems, Tagore claims the same place as assigned to Kalidas. He said:

I sigh and wish that I had lived in the golden age of  
Kalidas.  
That you were, —but what is the use of wild and idle  
wishing?

I am hopelessly born in the age of the busy printing press—  
a belated Kalidas,  
And you, my love, are utterly modern.

## POET'S PRAISE

Tagore's *Chaitali* was published in 1896. In this sweet book of verses Rabindranath has written four poems on Kalidas. These pieces showed clearly the deep respect and affection that Rabindranath had for Kalidas.

Rabindranath expressed so many times the wish to have a place in the literary world like Kalidas. In *Kshanika* he clearly announced:

Had I been born during the days of Kalidas,  
Certainly I would have been the tenth gem of the King's  
court.

In the poem *Kavya*, Rabindranath noted that the so-called learned people wrangled over the date but instead they could enjoy the masterpieces contributed by Kalidas for centuries.

The poet introspectively asked had Kalidas too faced the suffering, negligence and insult from his contemporaries as he (Tagore) had to do? He thought he (Kalidas) did and for that he described him as *Nilkantha*. Rabindranath felt for Kalidas deeply and observed that he must have swallowed the insult and injuries and gave honey or *amrit* to the world which the literature loving people would enjoy 'centuries after centuries'.

Tagore offered his warm tributes to Kalidas, who in his (Tagore's) heart of hearts occupied the place of the most ideal poet and master playwright. Rabindranath wrote :

At youth's coronation, Kalidas, you took your seat, your  
beloved by your side,  
In Love's primal paradise.  
Earth spread its emerald green carpet beneath your feet,  
The sky held over your head, its canopy gold embroidered:  
The seasons danced round you  
Carrying their wine cups of varied allurements.  
The whole universe yielded itself to your loveliness of delight.  
Leaving no trace of human sorrow  
In the immense solitude and sufferings of your bridal  
chamber.

Rabindranath wrote two long essays on *Kumar Sambhava* and *Shakuntala* (1902) and *Shakuntala* (1903) in *Bangadarshan* the journal founded by Bankim Chatterjee and latter edited by Rabindranath. Both these articles were published in his book *Prachin Sahitya* (Ancient Literature). In the latter article Rabindranath compared *Shakuntala* with Shakespeare's *Tempest*. He quoted Goethe who once said about *Shakuntala* that if anybody wanted to see the flowers of young age and fruits of old, if some one wanted to see heaven and earth together, one will find it in *Shakuntala*. Besides *Shakuntala*, *Meghadut* and *Kumar Sambhava*, Tagore absorbed himself also in *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvasi*. While depicting Chitrangada he had a famous line in *Malavikagnimitram* in mind. Before searching heart the eyes must agree and that could not be possible without physical beauty. In his *Guptaprem* or 'Secret Love' too the poet reflected the same idea of Kalidas.

Kalidas's *Vikramorvasi* centred round the character of the paragon of heavenly beauty—*Urvashi*. Kalidas's *Urvashi* was ever youthful. Rabindranath's too. Rabindranath asked:

Weren't you ever a budding girl  
Oh the ever youthful *Urvashi*?

Both Kalidas and Rabindranath describe the same *Urvashi*, the beauty personified in the paradise of Indra. Both worshipped beauty in almost the same style. 'The Eternal Woman' *Urvashi* was neither a mother, nor a daughter nor a wife beautiful. *Urvashi* was one of the best lyrics of Rabindranath. It was a successful painting of Tagore's thoughts on beauty. And critics would be tempted to compare even the details with the original piece of Kalidas. Probably, both borrowed their thoughts from the *Rig-veda*, the original source of the romance between *Urvashi* and *Pururaba*.

On his seventieth birthday, the eminent Western scholar, Sten Know, paid warm tributes to Rabindranath. Incidentally he mentioned the place of Rabindranath and Kalidas in the literary world. He observed : "It was an Indian poet who at last opened the eyes of the West. Through William Jones' translation of Kalidas's *Shakuntala* Europe came to know something about India's soul, about the ideals, the aims and the aspirations of



the people of India. And this led to a keen interest in India, her history and civilization. It was however chiefly ancient India which attracted the interests of the West. Kalidas was the poet, and the ancient seers and thinkers were the last and noblest product of India's genius. Even when modern Indians come to play a role in the spiritual development of the West, it was chiefly as interpreter of the wisdom of the past that they were greeted and admired. Then came the day when another Indian poet conquered West. This time it was not one of bygone times, but one who lived and sang in modern India, whose theme was that of the Indian landscape, the Indian river, the Indian forest and the Indian village of today. Again, the West listened, and marvelled. It found the same authentic beauty, the same sublime flight of thought as in Kalidas's immortal works: the old spirit was still alive."

## 7 | GANDHI AND TAGORE

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore hailed Gandhiji as "the first real politician that this country had produced."

The first reference in Tagore's writing about Gandhiji was in a letter addressed to C.F. Andrews. In his "Letters to a Friend" published from Santiniketan in 1914, Andrews quoted Tagore where the latter wrote, "You know our best love was with you, while you (Andrews) were fighting our cause in Africa alongwith Gandhiji." It may be recalled here that the late Mr. Andrews and the late Mr. Pearson went to South Africa and joined Gandhi in his Satyagraha movement. Andrews went from Delhi to Santiniketan to seek the Poet's blessings. On November 30, 1914, the Poet held a service to offer prayers for the success of the movement in South Africa. After the service, Pearson said, "On my behalf and on behalf of my friend (C.F. Andrews) I must tell you only one thing, that the message of peace we are carrying today from the Ashram of Santiniketan will always help us in our mission at South Africa."

Rabindranath esteemed Gandhi more than a saint. Romain Rolland had this to write: "Tagore always looked upon Gandhi as a saint, and I have often heard him with veneration. When, in referring to the Mahatma, I mentioned Tolstoy, Tagore pointed out to me—and I realise it now that I know Gandhi better—how much more clothed in light and radiance Gandhi's spirit is than Tolstoy's."

## TAGORE'S FIRST LETTER

Tagore's first letter to Gandhiji was regarding the students of Phoenix School. Gandhi was concerned about the education of Phoenix boys. First they were admitted to Gurukul. It was mainly through Andrews that Gandhi sent these Phoenix boys to Santiniketan. In the letter, Tagore expressed immense joy at Gandhiji's decision to keep the professors and teachers of the Phoenix School at Santiniketan. Tagore wrote, "That you (Gandhi) could think of my school as the right and the likely place where your Phoenix boys could take shelter when they are in India has given me real pleasure." This was in 1914.

It would indeed be interesting to note that among the Professors of the Phoenix School who joined Santiniketan were Kaka Saheb Kalelkar, late Professor Maganlal Gandhi, Professor Katal and Professor Rajangam.

## NON-VIOLENCE

Both Tagore and the Mahatma accorded the highest place to the freedom of mind. Gurudev's oft-quoted poem *Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high* mirrored the true philosophy of life, as preached and practised by both Rabindranath and Gandhi.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were wedded to the principle of non-violence. The Vaishnava philosophy had influenced both. It would be worth recalling to the sweetest poems by Tagore in his early years were in line with earlier *Vaishnava* poets Chandidas, Vidyapati and Jayadeva. Tagore's *Bhanu Sinha Thakurer Padavali* alone could rank him among the topmost Vaishnava poets in India.

Tagore's *Sacrifice* echoed his concern for non-violence. In his homage to Buddha, too, Tagore decried violence :

"The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred,  
The conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish,  
Crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed."

... It was here that the two great hearts mingled. It was here

that the clarion call for peace issued from two great saints of the age. It was through them that India heard the reverberation of the past sages who preached the philosophy of human love and kindness.

Tagore's *Bow-Thakuranir Hat* was certainly inspired by the greatness of the Vaishnava ideals of non-violence and humility in their conflict with brute power. It was commended by an eminent critic of Tagore literature that, in the Character of Basanta Rai, (in *Bow-Thakuranir Hat*) he (Tagore) showed the greatest of the Vaishnava ideals of non-violence and humility in their conflict with brute power. The idea kept recurring in his later dramas and novels and reinforced by the Gandhian cult it reached its acme in the Character of Dhananjay Bairagi, some fifty years later.

The Mahatma had described *charkha* as the "second lung of the nation." As early as 1905, Rabindranath launched a campaign to popularise the use of weaving looms. Persons who were in contact with Tagore during the Swadeshi days would recall how Rabindranath spent "a good deal of money" over the distribution of *charkhas* in the village.

Tagore's *Ekla chalo rey* was Gandhiji's most favourite song; *Antara mamō bikashito karo anaratamo hey*, another prayer song by Tagore was also a favourite song of Gandhi. *Ekla chalo-rey* inspired one to go ahead even alone if none accompanied him in the journey of life. It reminded one of Gandhiji's *Dandi March* when he started the movement all alone, and of his lone mission in Noakhali after the fury of the riots.

It would be of interest to note that Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana*, National Anthem of the country, was first sung before Gandhiji. It was in March 1912 that Tagore arranged to stage his play, *Post Office (Dak Ghar)*. The guests of honour of the evening were Mahatma Gandhi, Lokamanya Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The function started with the singing of *Jana Gana Mana*, which was tuned for the first time for the auspicious occasion.

## KEY TO SWARAJ

Gandhi visited Santiniketan in March, 1915 for the first



time. It was our historic occasion for Santiniketan. The reception accorded to Gandhi spontaneously was overwhelming. Gandhi never forgot that memorable welcome. "The teachers and students," wrote Gandhi, "overwhelmed me with affection; the reception was a beautiful combination of simplicity, art and love."

It was here that Gandhi first introduced the doctrine of self-help—the key to Swaraj. Prabhat Kumar Mukerjee, the Boswell of Rabindranath, has given an eyewitness account.

Gandhiji suggested to Tagore that students of Santiniketan should be trained to do everything themselves. Self-help was so long accepted in principle. Gandhiji wanted to put it into practice at Santiniketan.

In this autobiography, Gandhi has given a description of the incident. "As is my wont, I quickly mixed with the teachers and students and engaged them in a discussion on self-help. I put it to the teachers, that if they and the boys dispensed with the services of paid cooks, and cooked their food themselves, it would enable the teachers to control the kitchen from the point of view of the boys' physical and moral health, and it would afford to the students an object-lesson in self-help." The experiment was launched. When Tagore was approached and told everything about the experiment he was overwhelmed with enthusiasm. He said, "The experiment contains the key to *Swaraj*."

The teachers and students gave a 'proxy' to the servants: Eminent teachers like Andrews, Pearson, Ashit Haldar, Prabhat Mukerjee started cleansing utensils. Some Ashramites took charge of the kitchen, some of chopping vegetables. As Gandhi described in his autobiography, "a party of students played on their sitar before this cleaning party in order to beguile the tedium of the operation. All alike took the thing up with zest and Santiniketan became a busy hive."

## GANDHI DAY

Even today students and teachers of Visva Bharati University observe March 10 as the "Gandhi Day." Servants enjoy a full holiday. Students and teachers run the kitchen and everything.

On October 2, 1938, Tagore convened a meeting at Santiniketan to observe the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Paying glowing tributes to Gandhi, Rabindranath described the Mahatma as the "greatest soul in a beggar's garb."

In February, 1940, eighteen months before Tagore's death, Gandhi went to Santiniketan. Kasturba, too, was with him. A huge reception was accorded to Gandhi at the *Amra Kunja*. The founder of the Visva Bharati felicitated his friend as one of the members of Santiniketan Ashram. A life dedicated to the uplift of humanity was worshipped by another "world worker." Tagore said, "We accept you (Gandhi) as our own, as one belonging to all." It was a memorable event in the history of the Ashram at Santiniketan. It was a happy moment in the life of Tagore. It was a blissful anecdote in the career of Gandhi. It was also an event of tremendous significance in the annals of mankind.

Gandhi described this visit as a "pilgrimage." "Even though I call this visit as a pilgrimage I am no stranger here. I feel as if I had come to my home. I have received Gurudev's blessings and my heart is full to the brim with joy."

Painting, it has been truly observed 'is a silent poetry'. That a poet can be a painter or a painter a poet is nothing surprising. Rabindranath's love for the brush and the canvas instead of wielding the pen created a stir in the art world. Many ardent friends and followers doubted the poet's genius as a painter. But there he was with equal number of canvas pieces which almost threatened to outnumber the number of poems and songs.

Tagore's dramatic appearance in the realm of art puzzled many art critics who refused, in the beginning, to take him rather seriously. He was brought up in an atmosphere which was most congenial for an artist. His elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore cultivated the art of painting. His nephews Abanindranath Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore were the pioneers in the new art movement in India. In his University at Santiniketan he was surrounded by a galaxy of eminent artists like Nandalal Bose, Mukul De, Rani Chanda besides Abanindranath Tagore. Among his personal friends were Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Havell, Nicholas Roerich, Sir William Rothenstein, Yokoyama, Epstein, Kukuza Okakura and a host of top ranking artists and art critics of India and abroad. This interaction with eminent art critics and painters 'allured' the poet to compose 'poems in colour'. His global tours made him familiar with the new art movement in the continent.

## A SURPRISE

As his poems and music, painting came to Tagore, "as a surprise". He did not have any regular training in either of the three. In his Memoirs, we have some reference to his love for painting. Rabindranath was amazed by his new creative urge. Painting came to replace poems. The poet underwent mental torture. To quote his own words, "To tell you the honest truth, I do not quite know what my real vocation is or should be. If I were to confess without fear or shame, I may as well tell you that very often I cast looks of longing, after the fashion of a disappointed lover, towards the Muse of Art. But also, she is difficult to win, for I am passed that age when I could woo her."

Although he had 'passed that age', the Poet succeeded in winning his beloved. And it was perhaps due to same sparkling genius and hard work which gave him a permanent place in the history of world literature that goaded him to paint more than three thousand pieces.

Interchanging from one fine art to another perhaps, has hardly any parallel in the history of art. The new love was like an 'intoxication' and the Poet regretted he did not have much of leisure or 'seclusion' as he used to have before. Rabindranath lamented, "Had I been as free as in old days, then in the seclusion of some sand-bank on the *Padma*, I would have piled up sheaves of pictures as freight for the 'golden boat' of time. Now in the midst of multifarious engagements, the space that I can allow my pictures is but scanty—too little to satisfy my own mind. My new Muse is exacting, and claims the whole expanse of my time for herself,—which I feign would grant her. But a conspiracy of the other planetary influence,—the chief of which works as a penchant for trying to do good,—stands in the way".

To Rabindranath painting was a medium of direct communion with eternal beauty. He gave equal, if not more, importance to painting and music. That was why in his *Visva Bharati* (World University of India) at Santiniketan, side by side with music, equal importance was also given to painting. *Sangeet Bhavan* or the School of Music and *Kala Bhavan* or the School of Painting constituted two important wings of the University

where artists of eminence conduct research and experiments on different aspects of the finer arts.

The poet had no regular training in composing poems and singing songs. In the field of painting too Rabindranath had no regular training. It came to him spontaneously. In his reminiscent mood Rabindranath recorded this significant aspect of his multifarious genius. The poet noted, "When at the age of five, I was compelled to learn and repeat the lessons from my text books, I had the notion that literature had its mysterious manifestations on printed pages, that it represented some supernatural tyranny of an immaculate perfection. Such a despairing feeling of awe was dissipated from my mind. Then by chance, I discovered in my own person that verse making was not beyond the range of an untrained mind and tottering handwriting. Since then, my sole medium of expression has been words, followed at sixteen by music, which also came to me as a surprise." The same was true of painting at sixty seven.

Tagore was a lover of rhythm. Since his childhood rhythm had been guiding all his finer works—composing poems, singing songs and painting pictures. Introducing his pictures, Rabindranath wrote, "One thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creatures. My instinct for it and my training in its use led me to know that lines and colours in art are no carriers of information; they seek their rhythmic incarnation in pictures. Their ultimate purpose is not to illustrate or to copy some outer fact or inner vision, but to evolve a harmonious wholeness which finds its passage through our eyesight into imagination. It neither questions our mind for meaning nor burdens it with unmeaningness, for it is, above all meaning".

The poet was fully aware that his pleasure in composing poems was interested pleasure with an aspiration for "a permanent recognition from the world." But side by side there was a "disinterested pleasure" also. That was in the corrections he carried out in his manuscripts. To quote his own words, recorded in *Chitralipi*, "Desultory lines obstruct the freedom of our vision with the inertia of their irrelevance. They do not move with the great march of all things. They have no justification to



exist and, therefore, they rouse up against them their surroundings; they perpetually disturb peace. For this reason the scattered scratches and corrections in my manuscripts cause me annoyance. They represent regrettable mischance, like a gapingly foolish crowd stuck in a wrong place, undecided as to how or where to move on. But if the spirit of a dance is inspired in the heart of that crowd, the unrelated many would find a perfect unity and be relieved of its hesitation between to be and not to be. I try to make my corrections dance, connect them in a rhythmic relationship and transform accumulation into adornment." Tagore suggested that this was his "unconscious training in drawing."

Rabindranath enjoyed a 'disinterested pleasure' in this work of reclamation and he admitted having given more time and more care to it than to the immediate duty in literature "that has the sole claim upon my attention, often aspiring to a permanent recognition from the world."

### UNIVERSE OF LINES

Rabindranath imagined the universe of lines 'which in their movements and combinations pass on their signals of existence along the interminable chain of movements'. Observed Rabindranath, "The rocks and clouds, the trees, the waterfalls, the dance of the fiery orbs', the endless procession of life send up across silent eternity and limitless space a symphony of gestures with which mingles the dumb wail of lines that are widowed gypsies roaming about for a chance union of fulfilment".

In brief, rhythm was the life-force of all his works. Tagore was guided by his keen sense of rhythm in almost all his works, whether composing poems, songs or drawing pictures. Critics of literature would be surprised to find this unique place of rhythm even in his prose pieces or the prose-poems. This instinctive love for rhythm was responsible for the poet's love for painting and his genius as a master poet. Rabindranath noted, "my pictures are my versification in lines. If by chance, they are entitled to claim recognition, it must be primarily for some rhythm significance of form which is ultimate and not for any interpretation of an idea or representation of facts." If one

judges from this angle we could find every poet an artist and an artist a poet. To quote Ruskin, "The written poem is only poetry talking, and the statue, the picture, and the musical composition are poetry acting. Milton and Goethe, at their desks, were not more truly poets than Phidias with his chisel, Raphael at his easel, or deaf Bethoven bending over his piano, inventing and producing strains which he himself could never hope to hear." Tagore's versalite genius brought forth a perfect homogeneity among the different fine arts through the medium or rhythm. There could hardly be any parallel to this versatility in the history of art and literature in the world.

### EXHIBITIONS ABROAD

In March 1930 Rabindranath started his continental tour accompanied by his son Rathindranath and daughter-in-law Protima Devi. As the poet was ailing, the family physician, Dr. S.N. Choudhury, also went with him. In April he reached Paris, the cynosure of fine arts of the West. After staying there for a month, Rabindranath organised his exhibition. One hundred and thirty pictures were exhibited there. Among those who took initiative in organising the exhibition were Comtesse de Noailles, the eminent French poetess and Victoria Ocampo. Comtesse de Noailles wrote foreword to the catalogue which was brought out on the occasion. It was quite difficult to organise an exhibition in Paris as expressed by the Poet in a letter to Protima Devi, who was at Switzerland at that time.

The paintings received warm appreciations from art critics and connoisseur of Paris and the poet was naturally delighted. This was his first exhibition. In Paris he continued painting two to three pictures a day.

After this exhibition in Paris, Rabindranath left for Oxford to deliver the Hibbert lectures. There, he was invited by the Quakers to address their annual session held in London. Due to their good offices a grand exhibition was held in Birmingham in June. In August, Tagore held an exhibition at Copenhagen.

In September the same year, Rabindranath reached Moscow. Professor Petroff inaugurated an exhibition of his Paintings at the State Museum of New Western Art. Professor

Sidorov delivered a speech on the style of the Poet's paintings. Professor Ettingov of the People's commissariat of Education hailed the exhibition as a new cultural bond between India and the Soviet Union. Professor Kristie, who was already well acquainted with Tagore's literary works was eager to introduce Tagore's paintings in the Soviet Union. He observed, "It is with special pleasure that we have arranged an exhibition of his work in order to acquaint our intellectuals and our working masses with them . . . the more we are struck with the creative skill shown in his pictures. We consider these works to be a great manifestation of artistic life and that his skill will be, like all high technical achievements assimilated by us from abroad of the greatest use to one country."

Rabindranath was happy to note that thousands thronged the galleries. Besides the soldiers, the students and the generals, came the peasants, the blacksmith, the grocer and tailors. In his letters from Russia Rabindranath acknowledged the part played by the Soviet Government in educating the masses on importance of art.

In November, an exhibition of Tagore's paintings was held at New York. It was organised by Mr. Hari Singh Govil who stayed in America for a long time and was sure that the Poet would be able to sell some of his paintings and collect funds for the Visva Bharati University.

## EXHIBITIONS IN INDIA

On his seventieth birthday anniversary, Tagore's admirers in India organised an exhibition at the Town Hall in Calcutta, Mr. Amal Home and Principal Jnananjan Neogy were mainly responsible for holding the exhibition. Incidentally, although a number of exhibitions had been held at France, England, Germany, Norway, Russia and America, in his own country this was the first exhibition of his paintings!

Art critics and artists were baffled at the exhibition. They exclaimed whether this was art at all! The first exhibition was a part of a heavy programme of the birthday celebration. According to a contemporary artist there was hardly any keenness about his exhibits and 'in the heavy programme of celebrations,

the paintings were ignored and people were not conscious of their significance at all.

Another exhibition of his paintings was organised by Mr. Muk ul Dey, the then Principal of the Government School of Arts, Calcutta. In this exhibition were shown the paintings that the poet had exhibited in Europe and America. The poet was pained to find the 'abandoned' knighthood prefix to his name published on the catalogue of the paintings. This was in February 1932 and this time too the paintings could not 'impress' his admirers. This could perhaps be attributed to the fact that India was not fully acquainted with the new experiments in the art world. When Indian painters did not know much about the new art movement in the West, Tagore through his personal contacts and world tours had the opportunity of getting familiarised with the new movement.

In 1934 Tagore went to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for the third time. The aim of the visit was to collect funds for Visva Bharati University. In the exhibition, Tagore besides his own paintings, also included paintings by Nandalal Bose and students of the Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. A similar exhibition was held in Madras in October the same year.

In the winter of 1937 students and teachers of Kala Bhavan held an exhibition of their works. In this exhibition were included some beautiful landscapes by Rabindranath.

## MONUMENTAL WORK

The biographer of Rabindranath, Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, has recorded that Tagore had drawn more than three thousand pictures. Quoting Nandalal Bose, Mukherjee has recorded that the total number of pictures drawn by Rabindranath during ten or twelve years had outnumbered the total works done by all others in fifty years. It has also been recorded that more than fifteen hundred pictures were being treasured at *Rabindra Bhavan*.

A very interesting analysis of his paintings had been given by the poet in a letter. The poet observed that whenever he composed a poem he had a picture of his motherland before him. But no such thing presented itself when he sat with his



brush—neither the colours nor the lines, had any regional limitation. Tagore's paintings were much more appreciated in Western countries than in his own. In a particular letter Tagore dedicated all his paintings to the West. "This (his paintings) does not belong to the Bengalees because I happen to be a Bengalee. It belongs to them who like it. So I dedicate all these works to the West. Perhaps my countrymen have come to know one thing that I do not belong to any particular nation."

Those who knew Tagore intimately agreed that painting was only a pastime with the Poet. It was true that Rabindranath drew much inspiration from the new art movement in Bengal. It was quite natural for the Poet to have a peep at the new movement particularly when it was being heralded by one of the members of his family—Abanindranath Tagore.

Rabindranath himself wrote in *Chitralipi II*, "In the meanwhile the modern art movement, following the line of the oriental tradition, was started by my nephew Abanindranath. I watched his activities with an envious mood of self-diffidence, being thoroughly convinced that my fate had refused my passport across the strict boundaries of letters."

And what was the style of the pioneer of the new art movement? Abanindranath clearly stated, "In painting, the true artist does not depict precisely what he sees. He looks at an object, stores away the impression in his memory and after a long time, perhaps, gives expression to it." According to Rabindranath this was true about composing the poems only. But it became contrariwise while drawing. Rabindranath wrote, "The subject of a poem is present in the mind, however nebulously, before the writing of it begins; and then, like Ganga, as she falls from Shiva's matted locks, the cascade of words carves out the banks through which the stream of rhythm may flow. But the kind of pictures I try to draw, behave contrariwise. A line first comes forth from the tip of my pen and, as it goes on evolving a particular form in pursuance of its own suggestiveness, it more and more captures my mind, rousing my enthusiasm by the very novelty of such creative process. "If I had been a regular artist," continues Rabindranath, "the idea seeking pictorial expression would naturally have been first formed in my mind, what was born within thus taking shape without—



also a source of exhilaration. But when outward form casts its spell upon the mind, the intoxication goes even deeper. One result of which has been that the other duties awaiting me here dare venture no further than the door and, after a peep, they beat a retreat at the spectacle of my hopeless engrossment."

Tagore's monumental work in the field of art formed a class by itself. His paintings could be construed as neither objective nor subjective. He painted just for the sake of painting. In his own words he painted just for 'disinterested pleasure'. He was not interested in formulating any doctrine of art. Rabindranath himself assessed the value of his paintings, "I need not formulate any doctrine of art but be contented by simply saying that in my case my pictures did not have their origin in trained discipline, in tradition and deliberate attempt at illustration, but in my instinct for rhythm, my pleasure in harmonious combination of lines and colours."

Rabindranath Tagore was a versatile genius. He was not only a world poet, he was also a great essayist, eminent novelist and a great playwright. His monumental works in different fields—so rare a feat—formed an epoch in the cultural renaissance of India.

Tagore emerged as a playwright as early as 1881. As a young lad of 18, Tagore first wrote a playlet called *Bhagna Hriday* (Broken Heart). That was the starting point of a greater writer who had contributed to the world literature a garland of not less than 30 gems of plays and playlets.

The same year *Rudra Chanda* was published. It was written in blank verse. It was a rare one and the poet did not himself appreciate its style for in his memoirs one could find no mention of the same. From contemporary journals it was described as "a melodrama from the pen of a writer who belongs to a nest of singing birds and to whose credit it may be said that amid great temptations they have made great literature and poetry, the vocation of life. As regards the performance under notice we need scarcely say it is not drama, properly so called, nor an opera. It is a sort of an interlocutory poem, short but sweet."

*Valmiki Protiva* and *Kal Mrigaya* were perhaps inspired by Moore's "Irish Melodies." In his memoirs the poet expressed his strong desire to have a happy blending of eastern and western music in Indian plays. The offshoot was *Valmiki Protiva* with three songs tuned on Irish style.

In both *Valmiki Protiva* and *Kal Mrigaya*, Tagore acted himself in the main roles. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was present at *Valmiki Protiva* show. It was from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee that Gurudev derived great inspirations as a playwright even in his future career, when some critics went to the extent of deriding his dramas as "undramatic."

Tagore introduced a few new techniques in Bengali dramas. The novelty was of such high standard blended with a touch of mysticism that many art critics and artists missed the main trend. His social plays, *Shesh Raksha*, *Hrin Sodh*, *Arup Ratan*, *Prayaschitta* were received most cordially by the Bengali elite.

Dance drama with a happy blending of interlocutory dialogue and rhythm had perhaps the happiest treatment by Tagore. The poet was in his best form when we glance through the playlets on the description of Nature. *Ritu Utsav* and *Ritu Ranga*, the sweetest playlets, were things of beauty which were joys for ever, for all men, for all ages, for all time. In all these playlets, *Seshvarsan-Saradotsav*, *Basanta*, and *Phalguni* one could discern the great worshipper of Nature in his full meditation. Right from *Saradotsav* up to *Phalguni* the poet expressed the rapture of humanity at the beauty of Nature. This, the poet expressed through the dialogue between the poet and the King, who incidentally were the main roles in all these dramas.

## TOUCH OF MYSTICISM

The touch of mysticism so greatly influenced Tagore's writings. The eternal flow in human mind, the great search for Truth, the unknown, peeped in, here and there, even in these dramas. Tagore, in one of his famous introductions to playlets *Saradotsav* to *Phalguni* said, "Manifestation of soul is blissful. That is why it can accept suffering, death. The individual who avoids this path in fear or lethargy or in doubt is deprived of bliss in this world." That was the significance of *Saradotsav* that it was not a mere melody of flute to be presented under a tree.

This idea was further carried in detail in *Phalguni* where Tagore elucidated clearly "To know life properly we get its real manifestation through death."

*Mayar Khela*, *Raja O Rani*, *Chitrangada*; *Vidaya Abhishap*

dealt with human love, the supreme keystone to human existence. *Mayar Khela* and *Vidaya Abhishap* had touches of melodrama but *Chitrangada* was a dance drama *par excellence*. In its technique, one could find a happy blending of sweet interlocutory dialogue coupled with fine display in rhythm. *Chitrangada* created a stir in the critique circle. It was criticized by many as a picture of "human lust and desire." But perhaps it was ignored by these critics that "Beauty is truth and truth beauty."

Rabindranath was not blind to existing social evils. As the forerunner of a new reformation movement, of a great cultural renaissance, Tagore came out with his mighty pen to shatter the crumbling facade of a decadent narrow sectarian conservatism. He welcomed the dawn of a new society, healthier and stronger "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high." This idea had its best expression in different forms through *Achalayatan*, *Tasher Desh*, *Bisarjan*, *Rajarshi* and *Chandalika*.

In *Tasher Desh* (Kingdom of Cards) Tagore sang "to the glory of Destruction" (of the old order). The old order crumbled down. The dawn of resurrection sprinkled in sparkling splendour.

*Sacrifice* (*Bisarjan*) was perhaps one of the best dramas in the world literature. A great oriental scholar once said *Sacrifice* was the "greatest drama in Bengali literature. All these dramas are vehicles of thought rather than expression and they show the poet's mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its ritual of bloody sacrifice. The dramas also show how the poet was emancipating himself from the tangles of the solely artistic aims and life. *Sacrifice* shows how greatly we slander external truth."

*Dak Ghar* (Post Office), *Mukta Dhara* (Free Current), *Prakitir Parisodh* and *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleanders) were endowed with greater mysticism than his other dramas.

## RED OLEANDERS

There was a pang for search of Truth but the poet found it perhaps too mystic to give expression. *Red Oleanders* was the most mystic. Perhaps no other drama by Tagore had drawn greater attention and analysis than *Red Oleanders*.

There was vehement criticism against "undramatic" touches in *Red Oleanders*. And "sensitive man that he was possibly driven to doubt his genius by the critics who pronounced his dramas, undramatic."

An explanation of the drama was given in Tagore's *Paschim Yatrir Diary*. The main theme of the mystic drama was, "Nature is the fountain source of inspiration. If this natural fountain of inspiration gets choked up and fails to be infused into the efforts of man, then the process of his creation turns frightfully mechanical." Then man is tortured and gets hammered by the mechanical process created by himself. "The interpretation of the drama had the finest display in the hands of the new stage group *Bohurupee*, Calcutta, who ushered a revolutionary change in the Indian stagecraft by their superb performance of *Red Oleanders* in Calcutta and later at the National Drama Festival. There was controversy among the litterateurs in Bengal whether Tagore's *Char Addhyay* (Four Chapters) fell under the category of drama, novel or long personal essay. *Char Addhyay* with its long dialogue was perhaps technically beyond production on stage. It was a trend setter for Indian stagecraft that even the most difficult, rather impossible plays of Tagore were staged with clearest interpretations by the promising Calcutta troupe. The tragedy was that the master playwright did not live to see his dreams fulfilled!



Tagore was not an idealist living in a dream-world of his own. What Mathew Arnold said about Shelley did not apply to Tagore. He was not "a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain."

He was also not like Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* in her island home, secluded from the world. Tagore was out of the world, yet he was very much in it. He shared the sorrows and sufferings of the masses of the people not only of his own country but of the world as a whole. On the eve of World War I, the poet was experiencing acute mental pain caused by the foreboding of a disaster to the world. It was in that frame of mind that he penned those lines :

"Doest thou not hear from distance  
The roar of death?"

It was not only through his poems but also through his dramas in some of which he himself took part, Tagore expressed his intimate contact with the masses.

### THE MASSES

Among the dramas, the first was perhaps *Prakriti Parishodh* published in 1885. This drama which was a mystic one, portrays the heroine as an untouchable girl who succeeds to return

to the hero, a *sanyasin* in search of real joy of life. Why should the Poet select an untouchable orphan girl as the heroine? Forty-nine years later in 1934, when Tagore wrote *Chandalika*, he portrayed another untouchable girl Prakriti, as the heroine who could quench the thirst of Ananda. In *Malini* (1896) Tagore had depicted the picture of the ignorant and superstitious masses who demanded the banishment of Princess Malini only because she embraced Bundhism !

*Bisarjan* (Sacrifice) was published in 1890. In this drama Tagore, like Shelley, wanted to preach the "Spirit of Universal Love." In 'Sacrifice' in more than one place, the masses madly run to 'stage' a sacrifice before the deity. They were guided by age-old superstitions and orthodoxy. They possessed no power of discrimination between right and wrong, just and unjust. All these dramas *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Karna-Kunti Sambad* were vehicles of thought rather than expression of action. They showed the Poet's mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its bloody ritual or sacrifice. The dramas also showed how the Poet was emancipating himself from the tangles of the solely artistic aims and life.

## REBEL LEADER

*Prayaschitta* ('Atonement') was published in 1910. The hero Dhananjoy Bairagi protests against the injustice and oppression of the King. Dhananjoy was the leader of the masses. A selfless worker and undaunted in spirit, Dhananjoy was a character created by Tagore who reminds one of Mahatma Gandhi. By 1908 Gandhiji had launched his Satyagraha movement in South Africa against a mighty force. Critics doubted if the character of Gandhi was not reflected in Dhananjoy Bairagi in *Prayaschitta*, *Paritran* and *Mukta Dhara*.

Dhananjoy expressed the sentiments of the dumb, ignorant, and illiterate masses. He was fearless because he was a *sanyasin*. He had one goal—to achieve justice for the masses. *Prayaschitta* was revised in 1930 and was republished as *Paritran*. In Dhananjoy Bairagi, Tagore had happily blended the characters of two great personalities—one his own and the other that of Mahatma

Gandhi. Tolstoy realised after much experience of life that injustice cannot be replaced by another unjust act. His was the first clarion call of non-violence. What Tolstoy preached in theory Gandhi translated into practice and Tagore's Dhananjoy Bairagi drew the future programme for the Mahatma. Dhananjoy was a symbol of Indian leadership. Time and again Tagore said that the responsibility of shouldering the leadership of this great country could be vested only in a person who had forsaken everything in the world, a selfless *fakir*.

## DEAN OF PREJUDICE

*Achalayatan* was written in 1912. In this drama Tagore protested against superstitious rites which bedevilled our society. His revolt against the tottering social order, his utterances against the *mantras* were not directed against Hindu religions as such. This drama was much misunderstood in the beginning. Tagore maintained that "anybody who really loved his country would come forward to strike at the evil rites." In *Achalayatan*, Tagore shone as a great reformist.

Tagore's *Mukta Dhara* appeared in 1922. The oppression of the King Ranajit of Uttarakut compelled the subjects to revolt against him. The subjects were deprived of drinking water because of the construction of a dam by Bibhuti. The subjects were brought under control by Abhijit, the prince. Abhijit was an adopted child and hailed from a middle class family. The prince finally joined the masses and broke the dam and saved the subjects and their thirsty land. The prince had to sacrifice his life for that. He was carried away by the current.

## REVOLT AGAINST MACHINE AGE

Tagore's revolt against mechanisation of the masses found expression in 'Red Oleanders'. The King was exploiting the subjects. The workers who were collecting gold for the King became inhuman. They became mechanised. They were known only by their "numbers". They had no other introduction.

'Red Oleanders' was a protest against the Machine Age. It

recorded the deep sympathy of the Poet for the ordinary workers who were victimised by the new system of production in an accumulative economy. Deprived of land and home, the workers made an exodus to towns to swell the growing slums of the cities. The oppression, suppression, and exploitation by the machine squeezed out all sweetness and tenderness of life. The ignorant, bewildered, helpless masses found the only ray of hope in the music of Bishu who sang to the glory of Truth and Beauty even amidst the slums. Like Dhananjoy Bairagi of *Mukta Dhara* or Ratneswas of *Tapati*, Bishu brought hope to the oppressed and inspired them by his songs to conquer evil. Nevertheless he also took pains to inform the fellow-workers how difficult it would be to get out of the clutches of the King.

When Chandra asked Bhishu, "When will your work be finished?", it was revealed that "The calendar never records the last day. After the first day comes the second, after the second the third. There is no such thing as getting finished here. We are always digging—one yard, two yards, three yards. We go on raising gold nuggets,—after one nugget another, then more and more. In *Yaksha* Town, figures follow one another in rows and never arrive at any conclusion. That's why we are not men to them, but only numbers."

### MARCH OF MASSES

In *Tapati*, first named as Sumitra,—Tagore depicted a picture of the masses where they were marching ahead even without a leader. *Tapati* was a revised and much improved version of Tagore's earlier play *Raja-O-Rani* (The King and the Queen) published in 1892. Here the masses were not blaming their fate for the injustice meted out to them. They were more or less goaded to stand and protest against the oppression of the king. But here too they were not completely conscious of their strength and rights. The full consciousness of the masses were shown in Tagore's next drama *Kaler Yatra* or the 'March of Time' which appeared in 1933.

Here, Tagore spoke on behalf of the oppressed Shudras who had to serve the Brahmins and others for ages. So long, the

reins of the chariot (symbol of society perhaps) were in the hands of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. But now they have become absolutely powerless.

The chariot driven by the Shudras has taken a different route. The leader of the Shudras exhort his colleagues, "Now the call of *Mahakal* is not to grind us under the wheels of the chariot but to drive it." To the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, they say, "So long we have been working in the field to feed you. So long we have been weaving to clothe you. But you have not honoured the affectionate tie that binds one man with another."

## OF HUMAN BONDAGE

The playlet was dedicated to Sarat Chandra on his birthday. In a letter addressed Sarat Chandra, Tagore wrote, "The human bondage, spread throughout all countries through ages is the rope for driving the chariot. The chariot is not moving because of the many knots in the tie which have made human relation mechanical and unequal. Those who have been tortured, insulted and deprived of their ordinary rights so long by this mechanical relationship are now welcomed by *Mahakal* (Eternal Time) to drive his chariot and only after the elimination of insults, the gulf in the relationship will be removed and the chariot will march ahead." With the march of time, the oppressed, downtrodden masses would come forward and take the leadership. The Shudras were chanting the *mantras* and when challenged, they retorted, "Are we not men?"

In Tagore's dramas, the march of the masses could be distinctly discerned step by step. Their consciousness finds expression only gradually. In his earlier dramas the masses were not at all courageous. They were meek and ignorant. But, as Tagore proceeded with new plays, this ignorance gave place to consciousness. It would be interesting to note that while in his earlier plays the masses were merely dumb spectators, in his later works they became quite conscious of their rights, privileges and social status. In *Sacrifice* and *Malini* they were superstitious and ignorant. In *Red Oleanders* they became mechanised nume-



ricals with no power to protest. In *Mukta Dhara* they revolted but dared not take the law in their own hands. In *Kaler Yatra* they however took the reins in their own hands and marched ahead.

It sounds paradoxical but it is a reality that had Tagore restricted himself only to his few novels he would have been immortal. It is true he did not write so profusely in prose. The novels were some of the gems of Bengali literature. To be honest, some of these novels too read like big stories in verses. Each one is unique in its contents. Presentations vary. Characters are few so that the reader does not get lost in the jungle as in modern novels. Many critics tried to compare the novels of Tagore with those of Sarat Chandra. That could not be helped. The critics had to exist. What better subjects could be there than a comparison of the styles of novels by the two great stalwarts in contemporary Bengali literature. Tagore's novels would invariably appear in Ramananda Chatterjee's *Prabasi* and Sarat Chandra's in D.L. Ray's *Bharatbarsa*. It is a surprising coincidence that both appeared on the scene at the same time. Readers, many times mistook Sarat Chandra's novels as those by Tagore because the former never gave his real name. Once people congratulated Tagore for the brilliant new social piece entitled *Bara Didi*. It was, in fact, written by Sarat Chandra, the new novelist from Burma. Sarat Chandra's fans wanted to prove that as a novelist Tagore was no match to Sarat. The greatest tribute came from Sarat Chandra. Once a great admirer of the latter, to impress upon him perhaps, said, "Sir, we donot understand the novels of Tagore but we understand and appreciate yours. Promptly Sarat Babu said,

"Yes. That's because I write for you people. Rabindranath writes for us."

By far, the best novel by Tagore is *Sesher Kabita*, translated by Krishna Kripalani *Farewell, My Friend*. The book is out of print. It needs obviously a reprint, if not by anybody then by the Sahitya Akademi.

*Sesher Kabita* is the climax of Tagore's plea for platonic love. It is a unique novel with a special interpretation for love. Love is not restricted only to physical pleasure. Its horizon is beyond the stereotype meaning restricted so far only to physical link associated only with sex. There can be love beyond love. A married man must be devoted to the wife but it certainly does not matter if he has a lady love in his life. One is restricted, the other is limitless joy of life. There is no scandal involved in it.

*Sesher Kabita* was a bold venture. Published in as early as 1928, it was not so easy to talk about an extra-marital romance. Tagore, as in poem or in his plays, brought out a revolution in thoughts in the realm of romance through *Sesher Kabita*.

Amit Ray, a briefless barrister inherited great wealth. As was educated at Oxford. In manners, demeanour and habits he became completely anglicised. His hobby was in style, not only in his literary favourites but also in his dress, mannerism and his rare spirit of adventurism. To everything he would look with an air of damn it, dash it, don't care." He was dynamism personified.

Labanya is a daughter of a learned Principal, fond of learning, thoroughly Indian. Her deep love for Indian culture and the spiritual heritage was the result of her father's training.

Shovanlal, a brilliant young man, a class mate of Labanya hails from a poor family. He rose step by step only by hard-work. The Professor father of Labanya was fond of the student and offered the services of his rich library. In his heart of hearts Shovanlal had the softest corner for Labanya. Shy, hesitating by nature he could hardly offer his love to Labanya.

Amit was struck by the personality and deep learning of Labanya whom he meets by chance in Shillong. It was a head on collision not only between two cars but also of two young romantic hearts. Amit had been haunted by several fathers of

modern girls. Many modern girls also had been shadowing Amit. In short he was a much sought after bachelor.

Shovanlal never expressed in words his love for Labanya who somehow had never liked Shovanlal. Somehow a rose decorated picture of Labanya was discovered from his tin box. His father Nanigopal approaches Labanya's father and held him responsible for "trapping eligible bachelors." Poor Shovanlal had to leave the company of the Professor and his daughter. In the University examination however Shovanlal tops; Labanya stands only third. It hits her as a setback intellectually.

Meanwhile the learned widower Professor felt the need of an immediate marriage with a widow. He felt, before that it was his duty get the daughter married. So he thought of Shovanlal who approached him for consulting his library to complete his PRS thesis. An affectionate invitation from him disillusioned Shovanlal. He thought it was staged by Labanya. He was, however, disappointed when he was almost turned out by Labanya.

Amit, the briefless Barrister was however an outstanding conversationalist. He had no difficulty in cultivating Labanya. Both were fascinated by each other. In fact to Labanya, in no time Amit appeared to be the hero. To her, which she expressed to Amit, the ideal character was the latter. Yogamaya, a rich widow who appointed Labanya as the tutor for her daughter, was an enlightened lady. She too tried to fix up the couple Amit and Labanya in betrothal. The wedding bell was to ring soon. But suddenly a gust of wind disturbs the whole peaceful atmosphere of Shillong. The sister and a former fiancé of Amit appear on the scene. Ketty and Sisi more or less surround the house of Yogamaya which was the haunt of Amit.

Ketty was a completely anglicised girl whom Amit offered love while in London. They even exchanged wedding rings but Amit postponed the marriage. In these seven years Amit gets a thorough change in his outlook, knowledge and overview of life. He becomes thoroughly Indian. He is thoroughly impressed by Labanya. He is infatuated in love with her. He forgets Ketty.

When Labanya comes to know of Amit's affair with Ketty

he requests him to receive her back. To her Amit's friendship meant something higher than mere romance. His company gave her a new life, a new meaning to live, a new charm of existence and a rare joy of friendship. Labanya thought life was not so dry. Amit taught her how to love. She did offer her whole-hearted love to her idol Amit. In her own words, "The make up of the mental shape of Amit is by and large ideally literary. Each word in his mouth forms an ecstasy of joy. They are so lively because they have the background of his real experience. That is the harvest of his life's activities. That gives immense joy. That is why he needs me. The iceberg in his mind leads him but he does not hear its sound. It will be only my task to heat it and melt it."

The love born shy Shovanlal, meanwhile, sends a brief letter to Labanya. He was on a visit to Shillong just for a day and wanted to offer his *tribute*. He particularly wanted to know the reason of her constant rejection. He did not ask for any explanation whatsoever. This moved Labanya. Here was a genuine friend who never asked for any return. He had been so loyally only offering his love. In spite of her hot headed behaviour, her repeated rejection, her constant contempt Shovanlal never refused his love for Labanya.

She felt for the humiliated friend and extended an invitation with open arms. "You are my great friend I do not have its real price to pay you in return today. You never asked for any price. Today also you are coming only to offer the same without any desire for any return I do not have the strength (of mind) to reject it on the face of it. I do not have that pride any more."

When Amit came again to offer his love, Labanya asked him the reason of his rejection of Ketty in spite of offering a wedding ring. She insists on his visit to Cherrapunji, with Ketty. She returns the ring. "Let our love remain crystal clear, serene ever pure. An outward symbol is not necessary. It has no place there."

Then comes an anti-climax. Amit proposes again to Ketty. He tries to 'reshape' the anglicised Ketty to the original Ketaki. He changes her dress, manner, habits and shapes her in the pattern of Labanya.



Labanya comes to know about Amit's marriage. Amit sends a beautiful piece of poem. In return Labanya sends a gem of a poem, alongwith a wedding card. She marries Shovanlal. But the love between the two—Labanya and Amit—continues eternally.

## 12 | MYSTICISM AND TAGORE

A great worshipper of Nature, Truth and Beauty, Tagore was one of the greatest Indian mystic poets.

### GITANJALI

The invisible mighty power always haunted him. Tagore always felt that he had a communion with that divine invisible Being. This spiritual consciousness permeated all his works and a net of mysticism was cast all around. This divine touch found expression in almost all the poems of *Gitanjali*, *Gitali*, *Gitimalya*, *Naibedya*, each of which is a gem of the mystic poem. In *Gitanjali*, he observed "Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that Thy living touch is upon all my limbs".

The deep feeling of oneness with the unseen indivisible One, the omnipresent and the omniscient Truth eternal, guided him to worship Truth all his life. "I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep love in flower, knowing that Thou hast Thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart".

Tagore showed no originality in his thought of oneness with the Supreme Being. In fact this has been the crux of Hindu philosophy. According to the highest thoughts of Hindu philosophy the ever blissful *Brahma* reside in every heart. Tagore's prayers since childhood, the constant touch of his father, the great Maharshi, the saint, Devendranath, his study of the

*Upanishadic* thoughts, could not but leave their permanent imprint in his heart. This oneness of the Supreme Being has been the basic principle of all religions preached and practised in India through ages. Right from the Vedic days India has been singing to the glory of that indivisible Supreme Being. Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, Thyagaraja, Chandidas, Vidyapati, all sang to the glory of that indivisible infinitely Supreme Power. In the nineteenth century Sri Ramakrishna sang to the glory of oneness of all religious thoughts. Tagore's mystic songs had been no exception. It was not the wordings only but the feelings behind these mystic songs that caught the heart of the lovers of literature. This reflected the inner light of the poet through realised knowledge.

If the Upanishads sang to the glory of the Supreme Being in one way, if the great Vaishnava poets sang to the glory of humanity in another way and if Nanak, Kabir and, Ramanuja had given them a third dimension it was perhaps left to bring a fusion of all these. It was a harmony of thoughts completely oriental to the roots presented to a new world. The significance of this mystic approach to life would be all the more important in a machine age where man has become a servant of the machine instead of its master.

In his prayer to the all powerful Supreme Being, the poet showed the humility of a Vaishnava. "My poet's vanity dies in shame before Thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at Thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for Thee to fill with music". In his long journey Tagore did not want to escape from suffering and sorrows. He welcomed the Supreme Being in his heart to come with a burst of song 'when the grace is lost from life.'

And when the spiritual force in his heart of hearts inspired him to sing, the poet felt proud and forgot everything. "All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony—and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea."

### GOLDEN BOAT

In *Sonar Tori* or the 'Golden Boat' (1895) Tagore showed his closer proximity to Nature.

"Who comes singing and steering his boat ?  
His face in full sail and turns not right or left;  
The waves break helplessly at the sides !  
His face looks familiar."

(Translated by Dr. A.C. Bose)

In his salutation to "The Earth" Tagore recorded :

"My mind has wandered on the far sea shores,  
And gone to polar lands, where earth has shown,  
The nun-like vow of life long chastity,  
And clothed herself in the white garb of snow...  
Where long nights end without the break of day,  
In silence with no song.

(Translated—Ibid)

In Basundhara the poet wanted to mingle his tune to the every-day song of the air, the sky and the ocean. He became one with the Universe. He was in tune with infinity.

## THE INVISIBLE BEING

Tagore was convinced that there was some invisible power guiding destiny of mankind. He said once to one of his disciples, "I believe we are free, within limits . . . and yet there is an unseen hand, a guiding angel that somehow, like a submerged propeller, drives us on". The poet composed many songs in praise of this invisible power. In his *Search for Truth* Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan referred to an invisible power that guided him too. Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote "I think, decisions of my life have been taken under a sort of plan, and prepare, and yet when the choice is made, I have a feeling that an invisible hand has been guiding me for purposes other than my own".

## JIBAN DEVATA—LORD OF LIFE

In his quest of this invisible power, Tagore wrote, "Thou Thyself chosest me—I know not for what end?" Tagore thought

that he owed all his inspiration to this force—*Jiban Devata* or The Lord of Life. The lord of life should not be mistaken for a description of God. Quoting Dr. Mahalanobis, Professor Thompson observed, *Jiban Devata* "the Lord of the poet's life, realized himself through the poet's work; the poet has given expression to him, and in this sense has been inspired". That, in short, was the fountain of inspiration. Critics tended to compare this thought with Wordsworth's "Serene and blessed mood". In simpler terminology this experience of mind has been described as intuition. In his *Three Mystic Poets* Dr. A.C. Bose has analysed the mysticism of Tagore. Tagore had intuitive experience of spiritual reality. "My religion is a poet's religion. All that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge," he wrote. In another poem of *Chitra-Sadhana*, the poet addressed this inspiration as the goddess of learning. He dedicated all his success and failure to her. According to the poet nothing has been meaningless in this life. It would be through strides and struggles only that a man could lead to perfection. Failures in life must not dissuade one from any good work. It would be through the process of failure and success that a man would attain perfection. This showed some similarity of thought between this piece in *Chitra* and Robert Browning's *Pippa Passes*. There, Robert Browning observed that "Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world; look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time, but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue".

The search for the 'Lord of Life' continued in other poems of *Chitra*, e.g., 'The Farewell to Heaven', 'A Night of Full Moon.'

"O Mysterious One, have pity!  
Put off Thy infinite mystery!  
Come thou !  
Rend apart today that never quivering  
Shroud of boundless sky, and  
from midst of that unfathomed  
Stillness of waveless sea,  
Rise slowly like the youthful Lashmi,  
Rise to my heart's shore as I gaze."



In this poem the poet observed that he could hear the soft voices, the sweet jingling of golden anklets. But he cannot see 'the Lord of his Life.'

In his *Antaryami* or the Lord of the Heart, the poet was faced with a similar situation. He was wonderstruck at the beauty of the universe, its peculiarities, its vastness. He was equally surprised by his own creation. The poet was convinced that the Lord of this Heart has been within himself. He thought he would attain perfection on the day he realized his oneness with this lord, who inspired him in all his works. This search for the eternal Truth haunted the poet in innumerable poems. Among the poems in *Chitra*, *Atmotsarga* or self-dedication, *Sesh Upahar* or the Last Present were some of the oft quoted poems where the poet's mystic mind carried the reader to a different world—to the "calm loneliness" in search of the "heavenly form no man has seen."

In *Antaryami* the poet's search for the lord of his heart can be described in his own words where he gave a vivid description of the pathos of Valmiki's—the first world poet's heart where he realized the pang of his creative heart but did not know what he was going to do. This was the condition of Valmiki's heart just before he started the world-famous epic—the *Ramayana*. The first pang of creation at the sight of the death of a crane before its mate left an emotion in the heart of the world's first poet and he did not know what he could do with that new force. The new inspiration that goaded him to write the epic owed its origin to that tragic scene. And Valmiki's anxiety 'for creation' was as forceful as the 'hunger of' Garur made him write the *Ramayana*. This invisible force somehow forged him ahead and the poet wrote the epic before the birth of Rama.

"Even an artist knows that his  
work was never in his mind,  
He could never have thought it  
before it happened."

These famous lines of Lawrence could aptly be applicable to describe the mystic mind of the poet.

## AWAKENING OF THE WATERFALL

One of the best pieces that portrayed the mystic mind of the poet has been the "Awakening of the Waterfall" or *Nirjharer Swapna Bhanga*. Tagore thought that it was after a blissful intuition in his mind that he wrote the poem. In this poem the poet gave a description of the realization of the 'inner soul of reality.' In Tagore's words, "I seemed to witness, in the wholeness of my vision, the movements of the body of all humanity, and to feel the beat of the music and the rhythm of a mystic dance." Tagore himself thought he had a rebirth.

"This morning, the sun's ray  
How has it touched my heart?  
How the darkness of the caves  
Have been penetrated by the songs of the morning bird.  
Why is it after such a long time  
My heart is awake."

The poet heard the eternal song in glory of humanity from the ripples of the mighty oceans. He wanted to mingle his thoughts with those ripples. His thoughts crossed the barriers of age long limitations of ordinary human mind. Critics compared this piece with Tennyson's "Brook" or Tagore's another piece, the "River". But the comparison was only a crude attempt to draw similarities between the two master minds, which were superb in their own ways; both had different significances.

The reader's mind could waft along with the poet as he recited,

"The mountain trembles, the stones  
In vast series clattering pours;  
The waters' swelling and foaming,  
In anger and tumult roar;"

It's a new world, with a new force.

"In their mighty exultation.  
They would rend the mountain asunder" . . . . .

The poet has a maddening ecstasy. He literally 'pours music glad.'

The *Awakening of the Waterfall* would carry the reader with the poet from peak to peak and from hill to hill like the brook. The symbolism of this piece has been repeated throughout his work. In the words of a Western critic, "The poem is remarkable for its natural beauty; an example of this is its picture of the frozen cave, into which a ray of light has pierced, wetting its coldness, causing the waters to gather drop by drop—a Himalayan picture, mossy and chill . . . its symbolism recurs throughout his work."

In *Balaka* or 'flock of cranes', Tagore expressed his great urge for moving. To him, "the language of the wings of the cranes conveyed to the heart of the stationary the urge for moving."

## HUMAN SUFFERING

Tagore's poems on human suffering bring hope and solace for generations to come. In original *Gitanjali* in Bengali, he worshipped the cruel dear God for suffering bestowed on him. For, Tagore thought as the burning of gold makes the metal perfect pure and bright, so too it would be through suffering that man could lead himself to perfection.

In his personal life Tagore had to stand against many misfortunes and calamities. During the beginning of the century, he lost his preceptor, his father, and beloved wife. The same year (1902) he lost his second daughter, and very soon one of his sons. The pathos of his heart has been recorded in his famous poems in *Smaran* and "The Crescent Moon." He never prayed for joy of life only. His prayer was only to get strength to bear the suffering.

"This is my prayer to Thee, my lord—

Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows."

His poems will give strength to the suffering millions for generations to raise their head high above daily trifles.

**DEATH—THE BIGGEST MYSTERY**

The most mysterious event in human life is the final end—death. Tagore worshipped this 'messenger' of the invisible force who come crossing the unknown sea. "The night is dark and my heart is fearful—yet I will take up the lamp; open my gates and bow to him my welcome". In his poem on 'death' in *Bhanu Thakurer Padavali* written on the Vaishnava style, Tagore compared death with love-lorn Radha's longing for Lord Krishna. There could be nothing more mystic than death. And Tagore sang in glory of this mystic world :

"The evening star will come out when my voyage is done and the plaintive notes of the twilight melodies be struck up from the King's gateways."

Tagore was born in the busiest city of Asia, Calcutta. He settled in a little village near it and called it "an abode of peace"—*Santiniketan*. Nature beckoned him. Rabindranath's feeling about nature got expression long before his birth by the great German saint-poet Goethe who said, "Nature is the living, visible garment of God."

Tagore mingled himself as a part and parcel of the 'same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into, tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.' In *Gitanjali* he observed:

"The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

"It is the same life that shoots in joy through dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

"It is the same life that is rocked in ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

"I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."

This oneness with Nature, a unique unison with the infinite made the poet mirror the spirit of Indian philosophy. It makes one to echo the words of W.B. Yeats, "Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or



the parching heat are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilisation, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice in a dream."

His love for Nature made the Poet's work appeal to humanity. He was basically a universalist first and a nationalist next. And he found oneness among every living creature or plant. This identification with nature was the keynote to all his literary works. The poet himself said emphatically "The language of harmony in nature is the mother tongue of our own soul." This expressed not only his motto but reflected most vividly his realisation. This was the result not only of his hard disciplined literary works but it certainly was the result of his deep meditation in quest for truth. One could find Rabindranath not as a mere poet but a prophet guiding the destiny of humanity through a mutual bond of love.

Even in his childhood Rabindranath had an affectionate feeling for the plant life. Giving an account of his lonely wandering at Bakrota Rabindranath happily recalled, "My father was not at all nervous about allowing me to wander about freely even here. Some way below our house there stretched a spur thickly wooded with *deodars*. Into this wilderness I would venture alone with my iron-spiked staff. These lordly forest trees with their huge shadows, towering there like so many giants—what immense lives had they lived through the centuries! And yet this boy of only the other day was crawling round about their trunks unchallenged." This identification with nature was a result, besides the influence of the ancient scriptures, of Rabindranath's direct touch with lofty beautiful natural surroundings of the Himalayas which he visited together with his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore.

In his memoirs Rabindranath recorded his memorable journey to the Himalayas. "The terraced hill-sides, as we went

up in a *jhampan*, were all aflame with the beauty of the flowering crops. Every morning we would make a start after our bread and milk, and before sunset take shelter for the night in the next staging bungalow. My eyes had no rest the livelong day, so great was my fear lest anything should escape them." Describing the lofty trees of the Himalayas, Rabindranath recollected, "Wherever, at a turn of the road into a gorge, the great forest trees were clustering closer, and from underneath their shade a waterfall trickling out, like a little daughter of the hermitage playing at the feet of hoary sages wrapt in meditation, babbling its way over the black moss-covered rocks, there the *jhampan* bearers would put down their burden, and take a rest." "Child Rabindranath did not like to leave the place "Why, oh why, had we to leave such spots behind, cried my thirsting heart; why could we not stay on there for ever?"

## INFLUENCE OF SCRIPTURES

Tagore's love for natural scenery and the forest was nothing new. It was but natural for any Indian poet to have weakness for the natural surrounding and the forest. Explaining the influence of the great Indian epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—Rabindranath himself stated, "the scenery which appears to bring back to us the past of India is the forest; it is this which inspires our classical literature, which still haunts our minds. The legends of our great epic poets have grown in the shadow of the Indian forests and two of our great classical dramas of which the theme is love—love which separates and love which reunites—have for their stage the sylvan hermitage."

In the epic *Ramayana*, hero Rama was a great lover of the mountain and the forest. The king of Ayodhya forgot that he was in exile when he cast his eyes on the natural scenery of the mountain and the forest. Balmiki, the great poet assigned the highest place to the natural scenery. Rabindranath was charmed by the description by Balmiki. He wrote, "When Rama first took his abode in the Chitrakuta peak, that delightful Chitrakuta, by the *Malavati* river, with its easy slopes for landing, he forgot all the pain of leaving his home in the capital at the sight of these woodlands, alive with beast and bird."

Rama told his consort Sita, "When I look upon the beauties of this hill, the loss of my kingdom troubles me no longer, nor does the separation from my friends cause me any pang."

Rabindranath noted, "India holds sacred, and courts a place of pilgrimage, all spots which display a special beauty or splendour of nature. These had no original attraction on account of any special fitness for cultivation or settlement. Here, man is free, not to look upon Nature as a source of supply of his necessities; but to realise his soul beyond himself. The Himalayas of India are sacred and so the Vindhya Hills. Her majestic rivers are sacred. Lake Manasa and the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna are sacred. India has saturated with her love and worship the great nature with which her children are surrounded, whose light fights their eyes with gladness and whose water cleanses them, whose food gives them life, and from whose majestic mystery comes forth the constant revelation of the infinite in music, scent, and colour, which brings its awakening to the soul of man."

The occidental poets were also lovers of nature. The scenic charms allure the readers and keep them spell bound. But the playwrights did not perhaps assign so high a place to natural scenery as witnessed in Indian plays. Tagore was a keen student of Western dramas. While going through them he was missing some familiar things—the intimate relation between man and nature. Rabindranath observed, "In the western dramas, human characters draw our attention in the vortex of their passions. Nature occasionally peeps out, but she is almost a trespasser, who has to offer excuses, or bow apologetically and depart. But in all our dramas which still retain their fame, such as *Mrit-Shakatika*, *Shakuntala*, *Uttara-Ramacharita*, Nature stands on her own right, proving that she has her great function, to impart the peace of the eternal to human emotions." Rabindranath was conscious of the influence of the ancient poets, particularly their love for natural scenes and forests. Rabindranath explaining, in one of his famous speeches in Geneva, the religion of forest, recalled a scene from Kalidas's *Shakuntala*. The poet wrote, "In Kalidas's drama *Shakuntala*, the hermitage, which dominates the play, overshadowing the king's palace,

has the same idea running through it—the recognition of the kinship of man with conscious and unconscious creation alike.”

Rabindranath found a similar description of a hermitage in other Sanskrit masterpiece *Kadambari* which reveal “of the posture of salutation in the flowering lianas as they bow to the wind; of the sacrifice offered by the trees scattering their blossoms; of the grove resounding with the lessons chanted by the neophytes, and the verses repeated by the parrots, learnt by constantly hearing them; of the ducks coming up from the lake for their portion of the grass seed spread in the cottage yards to dry; and of the deer caressing with their tongues the young hermit boys.” What a vivid description!

### TAPOVANA

The right place to appreciate nature and have full development of mind according to Tagore would be a *tapovana*. According to him, “A *tapovana* gave to our thoughts their truth, to our sentiments their healthy orientation, to our actions their dynamic force.” Rabindranath not only believed this statement. He translated its idea into practice, when he started his *ashram* at Santiniketan. There was no place for drab and dull class rooms. Education was imparted there in a healthy natural surrounding. Rabindranath emphasised, “We see clearly through the works of our poets that the teaching of the forest did not lead to passive inertia but to true heroism and victory.”

All through the poet's works one could discern a harmonious tune appealing for peace. This great longing for peace was nothing but an echo of the voices of the ancient sages from the *tapovanas*. Consciously or unconsciously the poet created an atmosphere of a serene forest hermitage whenever he said anything on Indian philosophy or Indian culture. Tolerance and universal love have been the symbol and substance of Indian philosophy. And these noble thoughts were the result of the constant direct communion of the ancient sages with nature. Rabindranath wrote, “The ideal patrimony of ancient India was not the field of battle where the spirit is in perpetual war with the flesh, a monastery seeking to come to terms with the social order. What it wanted was to establish harmony between

our various energies and the eternal reality. That is why the Hindus are in such intimate harmony with animals, birds and trees that they may appear strange to the people of other countries." "Our poets," continued Tagore, "have told us that the *tapovana* is *Shantaraspadam*, that the characteristic sentiment which emanates from the retreat of the forest is peace, that peace which, on the emotional plane, is the reflection and radiation of perfection."

The 'perfection' of humanity may be described as synonymous with peace which has been the ultimate aim of a prayer of a Hindu devotee. According to Rabindranath, "Just as the mixture of the colours of the spectrum produces white light, so also when the faculties of our mind instead of being dispersed concentrate to form a unique current in harmony with the universal order, then it results in peace, the peace which reigned in the retreat of the forests of India, where man was not separated from his surroundings not ever at war with himself." Throughout his works one could see the common tune. In almost all the literary pieces there was an echo of the ancient saints singing to the glory of Nature.

*Manasi*, published in 1891, contained a number of poems describing Nature in all its varied hues. Important among them were *Prakritir Prati* (Ode to Nature), *Nisthur Sristi* (The Cruel Creation), *Barsar Dinay* (On a Rainy Day), *Ekal O Sekal* (This Age and That Age), *Akankha* (Desires), *Meghdut* (The Cloud Messenger), *Sindhv Taranga* (Sea-waves) and *Kuhudyani* (The Call of the Hawk-Cuckoo).

The poet described the sea waves as :

"The indomitable wind is roaming,  
Ungovernable in strength,  
Beating its thousand wings.  
Sky and sea in one are reeling together in vast confusion;  
Darkness veils the eyes of the Universe.  
The lightning flashes and threatens, the foam-fields hiss  
The sharp white terrible mirth of brute nature."

This has been a unique description of "brute Nature", Nature the terrible.



In the same book of verses there was another poem *Ahalya Prati* (To Ahalya) which also gives beautiful description of Nature. Eulogising this poem Professor Thompson wrote, "The greatest poem in *Manasi* is *Ahalya*; I do not think he ever wrote a greater, at this or at any time."

In this poem, Tagore drew a picture of Nature over the motionless Ahalya. He wrote:

"In the night when the tired children of dust came back to the dust, their rhythmic breath touched with the large and placid motherliness of the earth.

Wild weeds twined round you their bonds of flowering intimacy.

You were lapped by the sea of life whose ripples are the leaves' flutten, bees flight, grasshoppers' dance and tremor of moths' wings."

## GOLDEN BOAT

The *Golden Boat* published in 1895 as already mentioned consists beautiful gems like *Viswanritya* (Dance of the Universe), *Vasundhara* (Mother Earth) and *Samudrer Prati* (Ode to Sea). In these poems the poet expressed his adoration for Nature.

In *Viswanritya* the poet harkened to a call for humanity and the Nature. While not happy just by mingling his voice with Nature he joined humanity in the dance of the Universe.

In *Samudrer Prati*, again the poet felt himself one with water, land and air. Critics compared this piece to a western poet who sang 'from the first thou went, in end thou art.'

In *Vasundhara*, the poet paid tribute to Nature when he observed:

"In me night and day, have your flowers bloomed,  
In me have your seeds sprouted;  
For me do your trees shower their perfume and foliage."

In *Chitra* too a number of poems were included which deal with natural scenery like *Sindhu-Pare*, *Jyotsna Ratay*, *Shitay O Basantay*, etc.

River was neither a lyric nor a song but was a beautiful

description of a book which can be likened to Tennyson's 'Brook'.

In another song on river (in *Balaka*) the poet addressed the 'mighty river' whose invisible soundless stream moved on without a break forever. Tagore described the river as a 'medicant sister' whose music was in the mode of her movement without a destination.

Queried Tagore:

"Does the infinite distance respond to you all the time?  
His love is all destroying and so you are homeless!  
As you go on that frenzied tryst,  
Your necklace swings and sways on your breasts  
And the starry gems scatter in space;"

In the same poem Tagore described the flowers that fell ceaselessly down on the path of the river.

"Flowers drop down ceaselessly—  
*Jessamine, Champak, bakul, palas*  
On all your paths  
From your platter of the seasons."

Tagore's unique love for the river with its swirling ripples and "the terrific strokes of the immaterial flow" could be found almost throughout his works. Even in his childhood he was fascinated by the brook where he used to play with a paper boat. Later, a long stay on a boat on the River *Padma* brought the poet nearer to a river to enjoy the speechless melody of its ripples.

The poet had composed more than four hundred songs in glory of Nature. In all these songs the description of Nature has been so vividly perfect, the personification so accurate and masterly that the reader would be simply charmed by their magic spell. Plants, Spring, Autumn, Winter, Summer, flowers all converse with us.

The poet made *Briksha Ropan Utsova* (The festival of tree plantation) a regular feature of his *Ashram* in Santiniketan. This he introduced much before the so called *Bana Mahotsava*

became Popular in India. Tagore believed from the core of his heart the sayings of the *Agni Purana*, "One should worship trees as one worships a sage who is devoid of envy, for the tree provides shade, fruits and flowers even to the enemy, to the man who wants to cut it down." About plantation of trees it was observed, "The wise man should plant trees with due ceremony and treat them as his sons."

In *Banabani* or the 'Messsage of Forest' Tagore mingled himself with Nature. Poems in *Banabani* could be analysed under four categories. The first category relates to poems on forest, trees, creepers, birds, the second on different seasons in India—*Nataraja Ritu Rangasala* sung in glory to the creator of the great universe with all its sparkling beauty, the third on *Barsha Mangal* or the songs in glory to the Rains and the *Briksha Ropan Utsava* or the Festival of Plantation of Trees and finally those sweet songs on Spring. Rabindranath described Spring in one word—*Nabeen* or the 'Ever New'.

In *Nataraja* the poet described the beauty of Nature in different forms with the seasonal changes. *Baishakh* has been one of the popular songs where the *Rudra Rupa* of the Nature has been depicted and where Nature was in its fury. It has been compared to the dance of the Lord of Destruction. A very popular song—*Nrityer O Tale Tale* (In Tune With the Dance) described the Nature in fury. The poem *Asharh* welcomed the rain after the terrible heat of *Baishakh Gagane Gagane* was a popular song throughout Bengal where Tagore has drawn a beautiful picture of the clouds. In this poem the poet compared the sky to a big canvas drawn by the Almighty. Next few songs were on the welcome of the rains. *Barsha Mangal* gave us a vivid picture of Bengal in rainy season. In *Shravan Biday* the poet bade adieu to the rains. The poem *Sarat* welcomed the dew-studded autumn mornings. More than four songs were devoted to the glory of Autumn—*Santi*, *Saraler Dhyam*, *Sarater Biday* besides the 'Ode to Autumn'. While *Hemanta* and *Deepali* were two songs to the glory of the *Hemanta*. Next came the inauguration of Winter—*Shiter Udbodhan*. Six songs were composed to the glory of Winter—*Shiter Udbodhan*, *Asanna Sheet*, *Dance of Winter*, *Stob* or Hymn to Winter and *Shiter*

*Biday* or 'Adieu to Winter'. This was followed with a number of songs on Spring.

On a rainy day the poet's heart dances "like a peacock" and "spread its plumes tinged with rapturous colours of thoughts."

Describing the clouds the Poet sang in rapture,

"The clouds rumble from sky to sky—  
the shower sweeps horizons,  
the doves shiver in silence in their nests,  
the frogs croak in the flooded fields;  
and the clouds rumble."

The poet repeated his song,

"Ah my heart dances like a peacock,  
the rain patters on the new leaves  
of summer,  
the tremor of the crickets chirp troubles  
the shade of the trees,  
the river overflows its bank  
washing the village meadows,  
My heart dances."

In the seasonal change of Nature, Rabindranath found a divine touch. He welcomed this change by offering prayer to the Almighty. He sang, "Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs and the bees are playing their minstrels at the court of the flowering grove.

"Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with tree, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure."

Towards the end of the twenties, Rabindranath published *Ritu-Utsav* and *Ritu-Ranga*. Both these pieces were revised versions of his earlier works. *Ritu Utsav* consisted of five interlocutory playlets—*Sesh Darshan*, *Sharadotsav*, *Basanta*, *Sundar* and *Phalguni*

## LIFE'S PHILOSOPHY

In his personal life Tagore withstood firmly against the sorrows and sufferings equally well as he shared his joy and happiness with all his friends and disciples. Similarly, he

enjoyed not only the calmly serene beauty of Nature with beautiful multi-coloured floral garments with the dancing ripples of the river with sweet moonlit night of spring with the dew studied autumn morning with the hide and seek game of the August cloud beyond the mountain ranges, he also discovered and enjoyed the serene beauty of Nature in fury. The philosophy of life implied that one must undergo sorrow and suffering as gold is purified by the fierceness of fire. Rabindranath worshipped Nature both in its serenity and fury.

The Poet tried to discover the mystery of the creation and found the "dumb earth" looking into his face spreading her arms about him. Tagore observed:

"At night the fingers of the stars touch my dreams. They know my former name."

The earth's whispers reminded the Poet "of the music of a long silent lullaby."

The Poet expressed his deep love for each speck of earth. He noted:

"There is love in each speck of earth and joy in the spread of the sky. I care not if I become dust, for the dust is touched by his feet."

In the same poem the Poet emphasised that he did not care if he became a flower, "for the flower he takes up in his hand." He loved even the dust of this earth, for, he thought, he became "blessed and blessed he was in this earth of dear dust."

The Poet sang in tune with infinity when describing his vision he noted:

"Thou art a glimmer of gold from the dawn of my life's shore, a dew drop on the first white flower of autumn. Thou art a rainbow from the distant sky bending o'er the dust, a dream of the crescent moon touched with a white cloud thou art a secret of paradise revealed by chance to the earth."



# 14 | A WORSHIPPER OF TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Rabindranath Tagore commanded world respect, perhaps not so much because of his poems or the novels or the short stories or the plays. It was his search for *Truth Eternal* which placed him so high in the world. He was an explorer of *Truth* and *Beauty*. The world in general and the West in particular could not perhaps judge his poems or plays or short stories because in majority of cases what they had were mere translations of Tagore's original works. "The West felt that it could not judge his work—the poems in translation, at any rate, did not seem to amount to a tremendous deal but it could feel the greatness of his mind and soul."

## UPANISHADIC THOUGHTS

Tagore's search for Truth made him believe in the ultimate respect for and confidence in humanity. The Upanishadic thoughts which profoundly influenced him made him think in terms of internationalism. That had made the poet firmly convinced of the unique place accorded to a man as a human being, the final *Truth* above anything else.

The glory of Man, a few centuries ago, was exemplified by the Vaishnava poet Chandidas:

"Above everything else there is man  
That is Truth Eternal  
There is nothing nobler than man."

This *Truth* has been omnipresent and omniscient. No nation, and no country could have any monopoly in this particular sphere. Tagore recorded, "The best and noblest gift of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country : its scope may not be limited nor may it be regarded as the miser's hoard buried underground." This was certainly a thought borrowed from the *Upanishadas* and adopted by Tagore as the motto of his life.

## VISVA BHARATI

Tagore translated his idea of Universal Man to practical reality by starting a University to impart education in all important philosophies of the world. He collected around him scholars of eminence from both the occident and the East. He laid the first brick of an international university—*Visva Bharati*. This was perhaps the first honest attempt to give practical shape to the idea of international citizenship. Perhaps there had been many scholars and philosophers who had similar thoughts. Oliver Goldsmith had, long ago called himself "A citizen of the world." Tagore was perhaps the first one to train up students and to think in similar terms. The place of Visva Bharati in the annals of mankind has assumed tremendous significance.

A number of learned scholars left their home universities and countries and came to India to join Tagore. They came from Great Britain, from China and from Harvard (USA). The aims of Visva Bharati clearly mirrored the ideas of Tagore as an internationalist. Visva Bharati was started to study the mind of man in its realisation of different aspects of *Truth* from diverse points of view. It was to "bring together, as a step towards this object, the various scattered cultures of the East, the fittest place for such endeavour being India, the heart of Asia, into which have flowed the Vedic, Buddhist, Semitic, Zoroastrian, and other cultural currents originating in different parts of the Orient, from Judea to Japan; to bring to realisation the fundamental unity of the tendencies of different civilisations of Asia, thereby a full consciousness of its own spiritual purpose the obscuration of which has been the chief obstacle in the way of a true East-West co-operation, the great achievements of these

being materially complementary and alike necessary for the universal, the *bhuma* in its completeness”.

### SATYAM SUNDARAM

Beauty is Truth and Truth beauty. Throughout his life Tagore had idolised beauty. *Gitanjali*, *Gitali*, *Gitimalya*, *Naibedya* consisted of poems in appreciation and adoration of *Truth*. Almost each has been a prayer song. In *Chitra*, the poet sang in ecstasy to the glory of beauty. Perhaps the most outstanding piece in *Chitra* has been “*Urbasi*”. *Urbasi* was not only a description of of any woman. The poet in the beginning of the piece recorded “Thou art not a mother, nor a daughter nor a wife beautiful”. What else can a woman be? In *Urbasi*, the poet pictured Beauty. It was not any worldly beauty. It was abstract beauty personified. According to the late Dr. Thompson, the eminent Western critic of Tagore literature, *Urbasi* has perhaps been the best piece of Tagore lyrics. Thompson noted that “*Urbasi* is perhaps the greatest lyric in the whole of Bengali literature and probably the most unalloyed and perfect worship of Beauty which the world’s literature contains” In *Urbasi*, Tagore adored beauty. The appreciation of beauty has been just like that of a devotee. This beauty eternal was different from that described by Browning. Browning mentioned that he “cannot feed on beauty for the sake of beauty only”. *Urbasi* was more or less a description of beauty like Shelley’s Hymn to Intellectual Beauty where he wrote:

“Spirit of Beauty, that does consecrate  
With thine all thou dost shine upon  
Of human thought or from, where art thou gone?”

*Urbasi* can perhaps be compared with Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.”

### DESIRE MARS BEAUTY

Beauty is marred by desire. A serene picture of beauty is a

woman. Any woman is beautiful. Amiel observed, "Woman would be loved without reason, without analysis; not because she is beautiful or good, or cultivated, or gracious, or spiritual, but because she exists." That has been truth, beauty. That was a truthful beauty.

Serene beauty is abstract. Besides being absolute, it is also beyond one's reach. Only an explorer of *Truth* could seek for it. The nearer he comes to Truth, the more the bliss eternal flows on to him. This beauty has been much beyond the reach of desire. It cannot be enjoyed in the physical sense, but only in spirit untinted by selfish desire. It can only be worshipped.

According to Probhat Kumar Mukerji, the learned scholar and the Boswell of Tagore, in *Urbasi*, Tagore had worshipped the Eternal woman—Goethe's *Ewige Weibliche*—whom the poets have been worshipping for ages. An ideal woman must have two requisite qualities—the Beautiful and the Good. In *Urbasi* we come across the Beautiful.

### WHEN HE WROTE *URBASI*

The best pieces of Rabindranath Tagore's Truth and Beauty were written perhaps in his middle age. In 1895 the *Sadhana* magazine had to be closed down. Tagore was editing this journal. Tagore himself described in his reminiscent mood that he used to lead a mechanical life as long as he had to spend his time in a routine work. Now he was as free as a lark. The first poem he wrote after the closure of this journal was *Appeal*. There he wanted to know the real serene Truth and Beauty. "I want to be the gardener in your garden Oh! Lord." Perhaps his prayer was granted. This was the period when Tagore underwent great change. Pleasure and pain in life had by that time shown him beauty in different appearances. Tagore worshipped beauty in its different stages. That was why in the maddening dances of the Nataraja and even in Death Tagore found a divine beauty. It was "a divine inspiration", as Tagore put it himself. After his *Appeal* he wrote, *Urbasi* and *Adieu to Heaven*. And within a month, he wrote *Bijoyini*.

## WHAT IS BEAUTY

According to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the most important task of Beauty is to purify the heart and a good piece of literature and instil the sense of Beauty into human mind. All poets are worshippers of Beauty, but their works vary in stages. Beauty is realised in two different patterns—outer and inner. In the first, poets describe the outer manifestation of Beauty which in the other Beauty is invisible. But Tagore's appreciation of Beauty has been completely of a different pattern. His description did not centre round any part of the scattered horizon. He found the whole Beauty in man. It was here that his conception of Beauty has been happily blended with his philosophy of Truth. In his *Religion of Man* Tagore wrote "The infinite personality comprehend the Universe. There cannot be anything that cannot be subsumed by the human personality and this proves that the Truth of the Universe is human Truth. When our Universe is in harmony with Man, the eternal, we know it as Truth, we feel it as Beauty." That was how Tagore found in everything. Even in the Fierce, the Nataraja, and even in Death, Tagore appreciated Beauty because they were manifestations of Truth. In a sweet piece of poem in *Bhanu Singher Pad-avali*, and also in a piece in *Gitanjali* Tagore appreciated the Beauty of Death and found Truth Eternal and sang to its glory. He did not run after salvation. He was more interested in appreciating Beauty in this vast Universe, under the blue sky and beside the great ocean.

Tagore wrote :

"I do not want to die in this beautiful world; I want to live among men".

This was one of his oft quoted poems and the thought was similar to *Salvation*. There, Tagore preferred to live among men than to achieve a divine salvation.

In another poem Tagore sang in ecstasy to the glory of Beauty. It was from the core of his heart:

"Oh ! Beauty



Oh ! tell me dear  
How to adore you."

In yet another poem Tagore prayed to Truth and Beauty to touch him softly.

## TAGORE AND EINSTEIN

It would be very interesting to note what Tagore said to Albert Einstein (whom he met on July 14, 1930) about Truth and Beauty. "Religion applies values to Truth, and we know Truth as good through our own harmony with it." Einstein asked Tagore whether Truth or Beauty was independent of man. Tagore most emphatically answered in the negative. Einstein agreed with Tagore. Without man there can be no Beauty, "if there would have been no human beings any more the Appollo of Belvedere would no longer be beautiful". But Einstein emphasised that there could be Truth without man also. Tagore's reply to Einstein was very interesting. Tagore said, "Truth is realised through man and the Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being: Truth is perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind". Truth could hardly be of any significance unless realised through human beings. Albert Einstein's example that the Pythagorean theorem in geometry stated something that was approximately true, independent of the existence of man could perhaps be correct, but it was difficult to conceive of any Truth in the absence of any human being. Perhaps the greatest Truth in the Universe has been the existence of man. Tagore wrote, "We attribute to Truth a superhuman objectivity; it is indispensable for us, this reality which is independent of our existence and our experience and our mind—though we cannot say what it means".

## WORSHIPPER OF NATURE

Tagore composed a number of mystic poems of Nature's Beauty. He was a worshipper of Nature. Sometimes he got himself lost in searching eternal Truth in nature. In his *Chitra*, he wrote,

"How diverse are Thy beauties in the Universe,  
O Thou of variant beauty !

With myriad stars in the blue Thou gleamest,  
With boundless joy in the bower Thou beamest,  
Earth and sky Thou tradest, I spy,  
With Thy steps too soft and free !  
Swift-footed maiden I salute Thee !"

It was the genuine appreciation by a connoisseur of beauty. Tagore was deeply absorbed in the sparkling beauty of the universe. He sang:

"What superb Beauty ! At those delicate feet  
How gently lay the Earth, motionless and still !"

He tried to explore the Invisible Hand handling the entire Universe. He used to feel the very presence of truth and beauty before him. Tagore wrote:

"Beautiful, I know, are Thy armlets  
Studded with stars untold,  
Matched with designs and colours,  
Set with diamonds and gold,  
Thy swords are charming still that  
Flash in the lightening high,  
Like crimson wings of Garur that  
Flutter in the sun-set sky."

Tagore loved this world, because he loved Man. Tagore loved Man because he had faith in Man. He loved Man, because Man is beauty. Tagore loved Beauty because Beauty is Truth. Tagore loved Truth. He loved even Death because Death is Truth. Tagore recorded,

"Life I love dearly and to my faith;  
I'am sure to like as much also Death.  
A suckling, it cries off a feeding breast,  
Taken to the other, is instantly at rest."

## TRUTH, LOVE AND BEAUTY

In Tagore's *Chitrangada* one could find a happy blending of Truth, Love and Beauty. Just like Kalidas's description of the "Love at the first sight" between Dushyanta and Shankuntala, Tagore has given a sweet description of the first meeting between Arjun and Chitrangada. In this dance drama love was the central theme. It has been described as Truth and Beauty. Chitrangada was stunned at the beauty of Arjun. She remarked:

"Ah, whom have I seen in a gleam ?  
Is it Truth, reality or a dream ?"

In *Gitanjali* the poet has prayed to God to light a fire of suffering in his heart. Only suffering can purify a heart, just like the goldsmith purifying gold at the furnace. This eager prayer was perhaps granted. For, later we find Tagore giving a description of the serene touch of the beautiful. He felt the touch of Truth. From the core of his heart, Tagore sang:

"Sanctified are my limbs,  
And blessed is my soul,  
My Love, O Beautiful One !"

There could hardly be any description of Truth and Beauty so serene, so sweet and so deeply spiritual.

Man was the hero of all Tagore's songs. In line with the spirit of Indian culture and her time honoured heritage and philosophy, Tagore gave the accolade to Man, the central figure in the drama that is being enacted in the world arena.

The great glory of man has been the teaching of the *Mahabhatata* and other holy scriptures. Even in the fourteenth century poet Chandidasa sang in the same refrain when in rhapsody he said :

"Listen O' brother Man,  
Man is the highest Truth of Earth  
There is nothing higher than Man."

This has also been the teaching of Indian seers and saints. Sri Ramakrishna always said "Man is God" (*Jiva is Shiva*). Swami Vivekananda said:

"Oh where do you search God ?  
Leaning before the images of the living ones ?"

The mysticism that shrouded some of his masterly poems also proved this. His deep love for international harmony and human understanding flowed throughout. His yearning to associate himself as a Poet of Man has been clearly expressed in many of his poems. In *Orchestra (Oikatan)*, the poet mingled

his voice with the farmer, the worker and the common man. In Salvation (*Mukti*), he preferred a seat with the ordinary man to spiritual salvation. His much quoted immortal lines were:

*bairagya sadhane mukti shay amar noi  
ashankya bandhan majhay lavibo muktir swad.*

He wanted to have his salvation in the midst of human bond-ages. He wanted to enjoy life to the brim with the "world pitcher filled with honey of human love and the universe with all her natural flora and fauna." He wanted to "lit millions of candles with fire of love throughout the universal family of Man.

(*Salvation, Mukti, Sanchayeeta*, p. 437)

In another welcome song to the unity of Man, Tagore sang:

"Today at the sacred moment of the new dawn of  
humanity  
the new sun on the whole horizon greets the new Man.  
The march reaches its goal  
The unknown is conquered."

(*Udbodhan*)

In *Gitanjali* he greeted the light—the world filling light.

"Light, my light, the world-filling light,  
the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!"

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love, the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth."

(*Gitanjali*, p. 52).

In numerous songs Tagore expressed his deep love for Man, Nature and their affectionate touch. He even lamented how he would miss them after his death. He wrote:

"I have loved the world  
And have wrapped it within my heart in numberless folds.  
The light and shadow of night and morn  
Have flooded my consciousness,  
Till my life and my world have become one.



I have loved the light of the world,  
 Therefore I love this life.  
 Yet I know,  
 I shall have to take leave of it one day.  
 My voice will no more blossom in this air,  
 Nor my eyes bathe in this light.  
 My heart will not rush forth to greet the early dawn,  
 Nor will the starry night whisper her secrets  
 Into my ears."

(*A Flight of Swans*, p. 39)

As a clairvoyant the poet could visualises the future role of Asia in the conflict ridden world. A world torn with greed and lust for power, a world "wild with the delirium of hatred", and conflicts, unceasing anguish with crooked paths is looking forward to an eternal voice of hope and "loves lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey." And this inexhaustible treasure of honey—the eternal message of human love—can emanate from the Asian countries, especially India.

In his famous speech on his eightieth birthday, later published in the form of a booklet "Crisis in Civilisation" Tagore noted:

The turning of the wheel of fortune will compel the British one day to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their two centuries' rule runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will be revealed, bearing a tale of utter futility! There was a time when I used to believe that the springs of a true civilisation would issue out of the heart of Europe. Today, as I am about to quit the world, that faith has gone bankrupt.

I live today in the hope that the Saviour is coming, that he will be born in our midst in this poverty-shamed hovel which is India, I shall wait to hear the message he brings with him, the supreme word of promise he speaks unto man from this eastern horizon to give faith and strength to all who hear.

(*Towards Universal Man*, pp. 358-59)

Tagore's deep love for all men made him occasionally

revolt against social injustice and political exploitation. This got reflected in many of his poems, dramas and novels. In one of his masterpieces in original *Gitanjali* which alas was left out in the English version of *Gitanjali* Tagore gave a clarion call to the people to be ready for the reaction of the downtrodden, depressed and the exploited. Originally, in the *Gitanjali* in his long poem "Atonement", he noted those whom you have insulated and those whom you have oppressed will certainly not pardon you. Those whose plight you have ignored, whose personality you have thwarted, whose human dignity you have usurped and whose honour you have denied will soon come to power because in the righteous judgment of the divinity controlling this universe, this unfortunate lot will also one day come to power. When they regain their dignity and prestige, they would like to crush and hit back those who stood in the way of their progress and prosperity for centuries, "You will have to pay for the ignorance that you have caused. You have to pay for the wide gap that you have created. This has to be made up by those who have been responsible for creating them."

(*Durbhaga Desh*)

In another masterly piece where he described India as the "holy pilgrimage", the poet exhorted the people of the world to come to the blessed soil and join in tune with the harmonious symphony, the spirit of which is unity in diversity—the spirit of Indian culture.

(*Bharat Tirtha*)

The poet was a source of inspiration to the depressed and subjugated members of the society not only in his own country but also in the colonial parts of the world who have groaned under the tyranny of social, economic and political exploitation through centuries. He always stood by the down-trodden and championed the cause of their inspiration particularly political emancipation and economic progress. Cultural unity would be the main weapon that will keep the brotherhood of mankind nearer to the idea of global family. This was one of the main reasons why the poet opened the World University with his

limited resources at Santiniketan. He called it World University—*Visva Bharati*—in a remote corner of Bengal in India. He kept the door of this temple of learning open to any citizen of the world. He thought this would attract a number of devoted scholars and men with wisdom and imagination who believed in the universal brotherhood of man. A cultural cohesion was the prime objective, the first brick on which the structure of edifice of the global family would stand. In his famous poem "Africa", he greeted the dawn of a new civilisation, the spirit of inculcating courage and determination to build up a new society where freedom reigned supreme.

The most significant chapter in Tagore's *Religion of Man* has been "The Man of My Heart". In this unique treatise, the poet wanted to give a proper definition to his philosophy. Incidentally, this was the Poet's Hibbert Lectures for 1930. The Poet recalled the contribution of a number of Indian saint poets who gave highest place to man in their expressions.

Quoting Rajjab, the Saint Poet of medieval India Tagore had this to say:

"God-man (*Naranarayana*) is thy definition; it is not a delusion but truth. In thee the infinite seeks the finite, the perfect knowledge seeks love and when the form and the formless (the individual and the universal) are united love is fulfilled in devotion."

From *Naranarayana* Tagore came to the concept of *Narahari*, again the God-man. Tagore quoted Ravi Das, another Saint Poet, who sang "Thou seest me, O Divine Man, and I see Thee and our love becomes mutual."

It is through this process that man sees God in himself.

And another saint describes the Ideal Man, and says :

How could the scripture know the meaning of the  
Lord who has his play in the world of human forms ?

So the poet concludes,

"All these were proof positive of a direct perception of humanity as an objective truth that rouses profound feeling and love. This has been very unlike what one find in the intellectual.

cult of humanity which was like a body that has tragically lost itself in the purgatory of shadows.

Many western poets too thought this way.  
Wordsworth stated,

We live by admiration, hope and love,  
And ever as these are well and wisely fixed  
In dignity of being we ascend.

Tagore said confidently and emphatically,

"It is for the dignity of being that we aspire through the expansion of our consciousness in a great reality of Man to which we belong. We realize it through admiration and love, through hope that soars beyond the actual, beyond our own span of life into an endless time wherein we live the life of all men."

(*Religion of Man*, p. 113)

A roseate optimist he was, Rabindranath was sure that the world recover from the crisis afflicting her temporarily. His *Suprabhat* was a source of great inspiration to the freedom fighters for ages.

"Whose voice do I hear at the dawn  
No fear, no fear, no fear,  
Those who sacrifice their lives selflessly  
will perish never, never, O dear".

Man must triumph in his search for eternal truth. And what was that truth? It has been pure human love. So, man must know another man. Man must love another man. This world must become one global family.

The developing nations were given a new message of hope and fresh aspiration from the poet.

Tagore addressed the young developing nations with this special message:

"Through the troubled history of man  
comes sweeping a blind fury of  
destruction  
and the towers of civilisation topple  
down to dust.

In the chaos of moral nihilism  
are trampled underfoot by marauders  
the best treasures of Man heroically won  
by the martyrs for ages.

Come, young nations,  
proclaim the fight for freedom,  
raise up the banner of invincible faith.  
Build bridges with your life across the  
gaping earth blasted by hatred,  
and march forward."



Rabindranath Tagore was something more than a poet or a short story-writer or a playwright or a novelist. He was a prince among patriots. Tagore's poems inspired millions of Indians to fight the alien rulers. It was a fight which the pen waged against the sword and ultimately it was the pen that triumphed. India has been proud to have her national anthem *Jana Gana Mana* composed by the greatest poet of the century.

### FAMILY INFLUENCE

The Tagore family contributed greatly to the renaissance of India. Rabindranath inherited a lofty tradition. The Brahmo leader Raj Narain Basu was dreaming of an independent India. Tagore was fortunate to be in his company during his boyhood. His grandfather was a personal friend of the father of the Indian renaissance movement—Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Rabindranath's father Maharshi Devendranath had given a lead to the new pioneers of the *Brahmo Samaj*. Rabindranath's brothers Satyendranath and Jyotirindranath were playing important roles in different organisations for bringing about social reforms. Inspired by their spirit, Rabindranath wrote in 1888 the poem "Uplift of the country" (*Deshar Unnati*). In this poem Rabindranath maintained that if our countrymen improve themselves and stand on the path of truth, India was bound to be great. The same year Tagore wrote a series of poems on the Motherland, some of the

most important being the *Parityakta* (Forlorn). *Bangabir* and *Duranta Asha* (The Great Desire).

## BANGADHARSAN

In 1902 Tagore took over the editorship of *Bangadarshan*, which played a very important role in forming public opinion on the survival of Indian culture. It has been truly said that the writers of this group played an important role in the national struggle of India as the encyclopaedists did in the French Revolution. In one of his first editorials Tagore declared "the only endeavour of the editor since now would be to reflect the ideal of Indianhood."

Ramendra Sunder Trivedi, a great writer of the *Bangadarshan* group, popularised the ideals of Tagore in a long article in the beginning of the twentieth century. He explained the significance of a poem where Tagore maintained that "this holy land of India whose sons are strong and free, fearless, simple-hearted and without any bondage who have crossed the rivers, forests and mountains to explore eternal truth are not ordinary men." Tagore created an uncommon confidence in the hearts of the fighters for freedom. Public opinion was created through his poems, articles, speeches and strong editorials in *Bangadarshan*.

## NATION AND NATIONALISM

The intelligentsia of Bengal in particular were profoundly influenced by western culture and mode of living. Great teachers like Professor Derozio left a permanent imprint in the hearts of many young promising students who tried to avoid the "heathens" and their culture. Before Tagore, of course, Swami Vivekananda was there to utter his first note of warning against aping the West. Rabindranath made a compromise. He said we should not ignore either of the two forces—of East or West. He said, "Our present struggle to alienate our heart and mind from the West is an attempt at spiritual suicide. If in the spirit of vain gloriousness we shout from our housetops that the West has produced nothing that has an infinite value for man, then we only

create a serious cause of doubt about the worth of any product of the Eastern mind."

So far as the question of ideal nationalism was concerned Tagore did not like the Western model. Rabindranath maintained that European culture was limited in its scope and was not dynamic. The European states were frightfully fragmented; they differed on many points but on one vital point they represented a common character, that was the interest of their nation. Rabindranath said India did not stress so much on this nationhood, that (*Bharatvarsha rashtrapradhan noy*) Indian Society placed greater importance on humanism.

In 1901, Tagore observed like a prophet that this shift of emphasis to nationhood from humanism would lead the European states to clash against each other. Europe was passing through happy days and was dreaming of world peace but witnessed the First World War just after thirteen years of Tagore's prophecy. Tagore's conception of nationalism was also happily blended with the idea of internationalism. There was no hatred against anybody or any nation. Time and again he observed that a narrow conception of nationalism would not bring peace to the world. Years later in his *Crisis of Civilisation* he repeated the same warning.

## SWADESHI MOVEMENT

In 1903 the foreign rulers suggested through the *Calcutta Gazette* that Bengal should be partitioned. It was a crude attempt to create hatred among Hindus and Muslims in the country. Curzon's attempts to partition Bengal created a stir throughout India. Some described the incident as a "revolution" rather than a movement. It was a great united stand by the whole of India against the foreign rulers. The British Government had to "unsettle the settled fact". Bengal could not be partitioned. The Swadeshi movement gathered momentum. The second stage of the fight for freedom was over. In this fight Rabindranath took an active role.

Rabindranath was not directly connected with any political movement. His heart rose against the bond of slavery. His poems moved his countrymen. On many occasions Rabindranath joined

the processions that carried the national flag and lodged their protest against alien rule. With Tagore songs on their lips and national flags in hand thousands of his countrymen joined the processions. Rabindranath inspired young India not to yield to Curzon's blandishments. In May 1904, Tagore declared through *Bangadarshan* that there was no reason to get disappointed. Bengalees would not be divided by partition of the land. "This attempt to divide us will double our inspiration to get united. So long, we were living together callously; now we shall be united consciously. That very attempt will be our gain."

### SWADESHI SAMAJ

In the middle of 1904 there was a mammoth meeting in Calcutta. It was presided over by Ramesh Chandra Dutta. Tagore read a paper there on *Swadeshi Samaj*. It was here that for the first time Tagore asked the national leaders to concentrate their energy on the development of rural India. Tagore said, "The core of India lies in her villages. The problems of these villages are the problems of India. India will progress only when you can bring new life to these villages." Tagore raised a very interesting point in the meeting. He maintained that even in the past the king used to look after defence, justice and administration. The community used to look after welfare works like education and distribution of water. Tagore said, "Indians are trying to transfer more and more of their duties to the State. They are allowing even our social customs to be framed by alien rulers. There lies the fundamental weakness of our society." The village reconstruction through self-help was the main substance of Rabindranath's *Swadeshi Samaj*.

For that people are to be educated. They must know their problems and difficulties. They must suggest remedies themselves. For that Rabindranath suggested to the national leaders to organise village *melas* instead of holding big conferences on the Western pattern.

Tagore suggested to the educated youth of the country to help in the construction of schools, roads, ponds etc., without any direct political affiliation. "Only then, in no time the dream of *Swadeshi* will come true" (*Swadeshi Samaj*). Not only in

theory, Tagore had put these ideas into practice in many of his own estates. The programme was taken up by the national leaders on an all-India basis, subsequently.

*Swadeshi Samaj* had to face a lot of odd criticisms mainly because of the shift of emphasis on social uplift and social reconstruction work rather than political. Tagore's plan of action was taken up by Gandhiji years afterwards.

## NATIONAL SONGS

The first session of the Indian National Congress was held in 1886.

Rabindranath had composed a social poem on the occasion. The Congress was inaugurated with his opening song "We meet today at the call of the Mother." Himself a good musician, Rabindranath sang the song himself.

Tagore wrote *Bharatlakshmi*, a description of India at the request of Bipin Chandra Pal. The songs composed during the Swadeshi days that fired the imagination of millions of countrymen came spontaneously. Most of the songs were published in *Bhandar* and *Bangadarshan*. The songs emphasised the cultural heritage of India, unity in diversity, and instilled a unique confidence in the hearts of his countrymen. Many youths joined the Swadeshi movement with Tagore's songs on their lips. Many of the songs had been turned in the Baul style. Some of the more popular songs composed during the Swadeshi movement were:

- Ekla Chalo Rey* (Go Thou Forth Alone)
- Sonar Bangla* (The Golden Bengal)
- Deshar Mati* (The Soil of the Motherland)
- Habei Habei* (It must happen)
- Dwidha* (Hesitation)
- Abhoy* (Confidence, Fearlessness)
- Matri Mutri* (The Image of the Mother)
- Baan* (The current)
- Matri Griha* (The Mother's Home)

The national leaders popularised *Rakhi Bandhan* festival to bring people from different religions and provinces nearer.



*Rakhi* (a thread) is a symbol of cordial love and mutual protection. During the *Swadeshi* days, Tagore wrote a number of *Rakhi* songs, e.g., *Banglar Mati Banglar Jal* (Blessed be the soil and water of Bengal). *Oder Bandhan Jatoi Sakta Habei* (As their chains strain harder) *Bidhir Bandhan Katbe Tumi* (Will you upset Gods' ordinance) etc.

*Ekla chalo rey*, one of the most popular songs of Tagore (the most favourite Rabindra Sangeet of Gandhiji) was composed during the *Swadeshi* movement. Rabindranath wrote the song in August, 1905. It was tuned in the Baul style. Rabindranath noted:

"If they answer not to thy call, walk alone,  
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,  
O thou of evil luck,  
Open thy mind and speak out alone  
If they turn away and desert you when crossing the  
wilderness,  
O thou of evil luck, trample the thorns under thy tread  
And along the blood-lined track travel alone."

Like a devoted preceptor, Rabindranath offered constant prayers to unite the millions of countrymen. *Banglar Mati Banglar Jal* became a house-hold *mantra* in cities, villages and on the lips of the cultivators in Bengal. It played a miracle during the *Swadeshi* movement. Thousands of meetings were held in Bengal to protest against the British move to partition the land. The leaders used the song as their holy Bible. In this song, like a sage, Gurudev Rabindranath prayed,

"Let the earth and the water, the air and the fruits of my country be sweet my God."

Nothing in the world was dearer to Rabindranath than his beloved country. In his ecstasy Rabindranath sang, "Blessed am I that I am born in this land and that I had the luck to love her."

## BHARAT TIRTHA

*Gitanjali* consists of some of the best patriotic songs of Rabindranath. Perhaps the most outstanding of them has been

*Bharat Tirtha* or "Indian Pilgrimage". In this oft-quoted poem, Rabindranath has given a bird's-eye view of the entire history of Indian culture—the core of it being unity in diversity. Scholars compared it with Robert Browning's "Better pursue a pilgrimage through ancient and through modern times. . ."

Never before was the spirit of India—the spirit of co-existence, tolerance and love—described so skilfully in a single poem.

In another piece in *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath whipped the conservative reactionary forces that were responsible for creating hatred and narrow casteism, particularly among Hindus. India must repent for the injustice done to the so-called backward members of society.

### JANA GANA MANA

In 1912, Rabindranath composed *Jana Gana* the National Anthem of India. It was tuned and sung by him first in March, 1912 at his Jorasanko residence in the presence of a large number of national leaders who gathered there to see his play *Dak Ghat*!

In 1917, the Indian National Congress held its session in Calcutta again. Tagore composed "India's Prayer". He recited the poem himself at the meeting.

"Thou hast given us to live.

Let us uphold this honour with all our strength and will;

For thy glory rests upon the glory that we are,

Therefore in thy name we oppose the power that would  
plant its banner upon our soil.

Let us know that thy light grows dim in the heart that bears  
its insult of bondage

That the life, when it beams feeble, timidly yield thy throne  
to untruth,

For weakness is the traitor who betrays our soil".

Rabindranath's dream of a free India has been fulfilled. His ideas of reconstructing India are being fulfilled by the thousands of workers spread all over the Indian villages. To the workers of Community Development Swadeshi Samaj has been

a holy Bible. There can be no greater tribute to Tagore than to build this great nation—the India of his dream. With deep feeling and touching sentiments, Rabindranath once said that he would be proud to be born in India again, in spite of all her poverty and distress.

“Let the promises and hopes, the deeds and words of my  
country be true, my God  
Let the lives and hearts of the sons and daughters of my  
country be one, my God.”

*Janaganamana* was composed by Rabindranath Tagore in December 1911. The complete song consisted of five stanzas of which only the first one was adopted as the National Anthem of India on January 24, 1950.

*Jana Gana* was first sung at the 26th session of the Indian National Congress on December 27, 1911. The English rendering was published the next day in the *Bengalee*. The song was considered as *Brahma Sangeet* and was published in the January 1912 issue of *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, edited by Tagore himself.

### TAGORE'S OWN WORDS

It may be recalled that George V declared at the Delhi Durbar that the Bengal partition scheme had been withdrawn.

The song was first published in a collection of poems in praise of God Almighty under the title *Brahma Sangeet* in 1912. Later, while compiling his *Gitabitan*, along with other patriotic songs like *Hey more Chitta*, *Desha Desha Nandita Kori* Rabindranath placed the song under *Swadesh* category. In the poet's own order of preference this song got the first priority. The Government official, most probably Asutosh Choudhury, approached the late Ram Bhuj Datta Chowdhury who complied with their request.

All the four songs were sung at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. The first day's session started with

Bankim Chandra's *Vande Mataram*. The next day's session started with *Jana Gana*. Then the congratulatory telegrams and letters were read out, followed by an address of welcome to the royal couple. The function ended with a Hindi song composed specially for the occasion.

The record of the proceedings of the 26th session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta on December 27, 1911, noted "The proceedings (of the Congress session) commenced with a patriotic song composed by Babu Rabindranath Tagore." It added: "After that (reading out of cables, telegrams and letters of congratulations and the address of welcome to the King) a song of welcome to their Imperial Majesties composed for the occasion was sung by the choir."

In a letter preserved in Rabindra Bhavan it has been revealed that the chorus was composed by Datta Chowdhury and the first line was "Yug jibey mera padsha, chahun deesh raj Sabaya."

A report published in the *Bengalee*, Calcutta, dated January 2, 1912, gave an account of the steamer excursion by the delegates to the session, where some of these songs were repeated. The newspaper noted "First there was *Vande Mataram*, then *Miley sob Varat Santan*; ...the chorus under the able leadership of Mrs. Dutt Chowdhury sang the loyal song *Yug Jibey mere padsa*, ...Mrs. Dutt Chowdhury gave another song. The words were new—at least they seemed to be so, but they were redolent of deep pathos and patriotism."

(*The Bengalee*, January 2, 1912).

Giving a description of the proceedings of the Congress session, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, wrote on December 28, 1911: "The proceedings began with the singing of a Bengali song of benediction...followed by an address of welcome to their Imperial Majesties. This was followed by another song in honour of Their Imperial Majesties, visit to India." It clearly showed the difference between the patriotic song and the loyal song sung at the session.

## ENGLISH VERSION

Reuter gave the following account: "When the Indian National Congress resumed its session on Wednesday, December



27, a Bengali song, specially composed in honour of Royal visit was sung and a resolution welcoming the King Emperor and Queen Empress was adopted unanimously. (*India Weekly*, London, December 29, 1911).

The most misleading report appeared in the *Englishman*. It said: "The proceedings (of the second session of the Indian National Congress) opened with a song of welcome to the King Emperor, specially composed for the occasion by Babu Rabindranath Tagore . . . This was followed by another song in Hindi welcoming Their Imperial Majesties. The choir in both songs was led by Mrs. Rambhuj Dutt Choudhury."

(*The Englishman*, December 28, 1911).

This report did not agree with the one given by either the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *The Bengalee* or the report of the 26th session of the Indian National Congress.

Another English-owned newspaper, *The Statesman*, reported: "The proceedings commenced shortly before 12 o'clock with a Bengali song. The choir of girls led by Sarala Devi (Mrs. Rambhuj Dutt Choudhury) then sang a hymn of welcome to the King specially composed for the occasion by Babu Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet."

Two significant points to be noticed were firstly the reports in all the Indian-owned papers, i.e., the *Bengalee*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, categorically maintained that *Janaganamana* was a patriotic song. The official report of the proceedings of the 26th Congress also supported this view. Secondly, only the English-owned agency *Reuter* and the English-owned *Indi Weekly* and *The Statesman* described *Janagana* as a hymn in praise of the King.

## OPENING INVOCATION

Whether it was intentional or due to the ignorance of foreign journalists of Indian languages like Bengali and Hindi has yet to be analysed but the matter did not end here. The song was repeated at the session of the Indian National Congress held again in Calcutta. It would be interesting to note how the journals described *Janagana* when it was again sung at the Congress session. That, meanwhile their ownership did not change hands would be important point to note.

The first session of the Indian National Congress again opened with *Vande Mataram* as usual. Rabindranath was present there. He read out an opening invocation. Some persons mixed up this invocation with *Janagana*. In fact this invocation was written afresh. It read as follows:

"Thou hast given us to live.  
Let us uphold this honour with  
all our strength and will. . ."

The second day's session started with Sarala Devi's *Atil-gouraba bahini momo bani gaho aji Hindustan*. The third day's session started with *Janagana*.

The same *Statesman* this time described the song as a patriotic song. It wrote: "A national song composed by Sir Rabindranath Tagore having been sung the following resolution was moved. . . . ."

(*The Statesman*, December 30, 1917).

It would also be interesting to note what Chitta Ranjan Das said about *Janagana*. He observed: "Brother delegates, at the very outset I desire to refer to the song to which you have just listened. It is a song of the glory and victory of India. We stand here today on this platform for the glory and victory of India (cheers)."

(*Official Report of the Indian National Congress*,  
third day's proceedings p. 108).

*The Bengalee* recorded: "Mr. C.R. Dass desired to refer to the song which they had just listened to. It is the song of the victory of India (hear, hear). They stood there that day on that platform for the glory and victory of India (hear, hear)."

(*The Bengalee*, December 30, 1917).

If the song were composed in praise of King George V could it be repeated at the session of the Indian National Congress? Could it be described by veteran leaders like Desha-bandhu as the song of the victory of India? Could it be described by the same *The Statesman* and other agencies as "a national song"? All these set at rest the insinuation and canard spread about *Janaganamana* as sung in praise of the English Monarch.

Very soon the song attracted wider attention through translation. The poet's translated version was first published in the

*Modern Review* in February, 1918. Next year, the poet made a journey to South India when he rendered another English version of the song. This was popularly known as the "Morning Song of India." The translation reads as follows:

Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people,  
 Thou Dispenser of India's destiny.  
 Thy name rouses the hearts to the Punjab, Sind,  
 Gujarat and Maratha, of Dravid,  
 Orissa and Bengal.  
 It echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas,  
 mingles in the music of Jamuna and Ganges  
 and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea.  
 They pray for the blessing and sing thy praise,  
 Thou Dispenser of India's destiny,  
 Victory, Victory, Victory to thee.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose adopted *Janagana* as the National Anthem immediately after the formation of the Indian National Army. The song was rendered into Hindustani by Mr. Husain, the young poet from Lyalpur, at the direction of Netaji. It was recorded in *Arji Hukumat-i-Azad Hind*. Tagore's song *Jayaho* has become our National Anthem."

(*The Diary of a Rebel Daughter of India*, 1945, p. 41).

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose proclaimed his idea of forming the INA in Singapore on July 5, 1943. He proclaimed the formation of the *Azad Hind Government* on October 21, 1943. The INA hoisted the Indian National Flag in the battlefield of Moudak in March 1944. On all these memorable occasions the song of *Jana gana mana* was sung. Could a patriot like Subhas Bose, who never compromised with British rulers, use a song composed in honour of George V ?

Never in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many to so few, so observed Winston Churchill paying tribute to the Airmen who strove to keep the British sky rid of Nazi war planes. Similarly, no song in history so rallied a people to fight their oppressors as Rabindranath Tagore's *Sonar Bangla*. For the people of Bangladesh it was their war cry and battle hymn; its text, its tune, its rhythm so inspired and unarmed people to face the brute force of the Pakistan Army. Now it has become their national anthem.

National enthusiasm is the great nursery of genius. National symbols are the most significant indicators of a nation's culture, civilization, human values and more significantly the hopes and aspirations of the people. Bangladesh has adopted *Sonar Bangla* as the national anthem. This showed their abiding love and respect for the Poet.

An anthem is a song of praise or gladness. A national anthem is the symbol of hope and aspiration of a people. It comes very near the category of a holy hymn.

Rabindranath Tagore scored perhaps the first honour of being the composer of two different songs which were affectionately and wholeheartedly accepted as their national anthem by the people of two secular progressive democratic States of the world. Tagore's 'Morning Song of India' *Jana gana mana* was adopted as the National Anthem of free India. *Sonar Bangla* was composed by Tagore seven years earlier than the 'Morning

Song'. It has been the symbol of love, respect and veneration for the Motherland of seventy five million people or Bangladesh. It records the deep impact of the masterly works of a prophet who could mirror the minds of his countrymen. It was Tagore who could foresee the events of history as a prophet and could guide a nation through his immortal songs from darkness to light, from frustration to new hopes and aspirations and from death to immortality. Incidentally, before the 'Morning Song of India' became the National Anthem of India, a Hindusthani version of the same was adopted as the symbol of hope and forward march by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It would be interesting to trace the background of the song *Sonar Bangla* which played such an important role in the history of a nation and still more to play a vital role in instilling inspiration to its forward march to peace, prosperity and progress.

*Sonar Bangla* was first published in the October, 1905 issue of the *Bangadarshan*, one of the most illustrious journals of that time. The journal carried another stirring patriotic song entitled *Deshar Mati* along with it. There, Tagore sang in almost an equally melodious tune:

*O amar desher mati*  
*Tomar pare thekai matha*  
 O the soil of my Motherland  
 I touch my head on thy feet

During the next fortnight Tagore wrote some of his most popular songs which were on the lips of the masses in Bengal in particular and India in general during the Swadeshi movement. One such was *Banglar mati Banglar jal* where the poet exhorted,

Let the earth and the water, the air and the fruits of my  
 country be sweet, my God  
 Let the homes and marts, the forests and fields of my coun-  
 try be full, my God



Let the promises and hopes, the deeds and words of my  
country be true, my God  
Let the lives and hearts of the sons and daughters of my  
country be one, my God

In another song composed during the same week *Ebar tor mara gange ban esече jaima bole bhasa tori*, the Poet wrote,

"The flood, at last, has come upon your dry river-bed  
cry for the boatman, cut the cordage, launch the boat."

No wonder, Bangabandhu Mujib chose the boat as the symbol of his election before the revolution !

Still in another poem composed just a few days later the poet gave a stirring call for, if necessary, a lone journey—

*Jadi tor dak Sune keu na ase tabe ekla chalo ray* Tagore noted,

"If they answer not to thy call walk alone,  
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing  
the wall O thou of evil luck,  
open thy mind speak out alone".

Still more significant was the Poet's song in the next issue of *Bangadarshan* entitled *Abhoi* or Fearlessness

*ami bhoi korbona bhoi korbo na*  
*Dubela marar age, morbo na bhai morbo na*

## BAUL TUNE

Choreographically, *Sonar Bangla* comes under the category of folk songs. Its rhyme and rhythm were typically of the *Baul* style, popularised and almost revived by Rabindranath. It may be recalled that during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the popular folk tunes prevalent in Bengal were *Kirtan*, *Ramprasadi* and *Bhatiali*. Even Tagore himself composed many patriotic songs which he tuned in *Ramprasadi* style. When in 1886 the Indian National Congress held

its first session in Calcutta, Tagore composed a special song *amra milechi aj mayer dakey* which he himself tuned and sang at the inaugural session. The song was tuned in the popular *Ramprasadi* tune. Later Rabindranath preferred the *Baul* tune. Majority of the songs composed during the Swadeshi movement were tuned in this typical almost lost and much forgotten *Baul* tune. The *Bauls* were a class by themselves. Although *Kirtan* or *Ramprasadi* had some religious link, *Baul* had no such lineage. Describing these special characteristic wandering bards as mystic as the poet himself, Rabindranath observed, "Though the *Bauls* count amongst their following a variety of sects and castes, both Hindu and Moslem, chiefly coming from the lower social ranks, they refuse to give any other account of themselves to the questioner than that they are *Bauls*. They acknowledge none of the social or religious formalities, but delight in the ever changing play of life, which cannot be expressed in mere words but of which something may be captured in song, through the ineffable medium of rhythm and tune".

(*The Religion of Man*, p. 212)

It was perhaps the secular characteristic of the *Baul* that fascinated the poet. The poet had first-hand knowledge of the *Baul* with his intimate association with them at Faridpur in East Bengal, now in Bangladesh. He directly interviewed many of them and came in close contact with them which influenced him so much that he himself later practised *Baul Sangeet* and even *Baul Dance*.

In October 1931, when the poet was seventy-years old, a collection of his songs numbering about 1485 was published under the title *Gitanitan*. It was received warmly by the readers, particularly the music loving public. But the poet was not happy about the arrangements of the songs. Originally these songs were arranged according to the dates of composition. The poet wanted them to be arranged subject-wise which was not possible immediately due to paucity of time.

The poet assigned the task of arranging the songs subject-wise to his illustrious literary assistant Sudhir Chandra Kar who

took more than an year to complete it. But the *Akhanda Gitabitan* in its new form was not published before October 1938. The whole plan was minutely scanned by the poet. The new *Gitabitan* was divided into six parts—*Puja* (consisting of devotional songs); *Swadesh* (devoted to Patriotic songs), *Prem* (consisting of love songs); *Prakriti* (songs on seasons and nature); *Bichitra* (miscellaneous) and *Gitinatya* and *Nritya* (Interlocutory dance songs). What was most interesting to note has been that under *Swadesh* only forty six patriotic songs were selected out of his entire work. And the poet himself placed *Sonar Bangla* on the top of all his patriotic songs; *Deshar Mati* was placed next to it.

A great nationalist, the poet had an unbounded love for the whole of India. But certainly *Sonar Bangla* had a special pride of place in his fancy. This tender treatment did not escape the eyes of critics of Tagore literature. In his masterly analysis of Patriotism of Rabindranath, the former Vice Chancellor of Dacca University Dr. Charu Chandra Bandyopadhyay rightly commented, "although the poet felt always for whole of India as an indivisible entity he had a special love for Bengal. That was why he sang time and again,

*Amar sonar Bangla,  
ami tomai bhalobasi  
Chirodin tomar akash, tomar batash  
amar praney bajai banshi"*

(*Rabi Rashmi II*, p. 364)

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rehman had drawn great inspiration from Poet Tagore. In his Dhanmandi house in Dacca there used to be only one picture that of Poet Rabindranath hanging on the wall. When Bangabandhu touched the soil of Bengal after his nine months' incarceration in West Pakistan prison, he was overwhelmed with joy. With tears in his eyes he greeted the Motherland in Tagore's words,

*"Nomo namo namo Sundari mano  
Janani Bangabhumii,  
Gangar Tir, Smigdha Samir*

*Jivan jurale tumi*"

(From *Dui Bigha Jami*)

At the historic mammoth public meeting at Racecourse maidan in Dacca the dauntless Sheikh challenged and repudiated most affectionately the lamentation of the poet who once wrote "you have seven crores of Bengalees O mother dear only as your children but not men"

*'Sat koti santanere  
hay mugdha janani  
Rekhecho Bangali kore  
manush karoni'*

Just after the Sheikh's swearing in ceremony as Prime Minister, numerous journalists surrounded him for his message. The Sheikh kept quiet for half-a-minute. Then he recited,

*Udayer pathe suni kar bani  
bhoi nai oray bhoi nai  
Nihsheshe pran je koribey dan  
kshoy nai tar kshoy nai.  
Oh hark the message of new life !*

Be not afraid O beloved, He can never vanish, he is immortal, who give his life selflessly.

Certainly the great selfless sacrifice of the *Shaheeds* have made them immortal.



It was Romain Rolland who observed that 'Music is the mirror of soul'. Tagore's two thousand songs reflected the soul of India. The poet himself gave the notations for most of his songs.

In his childhood, he was much inspired by his elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore who was well-versed both in Western and Eastern Music. It was then that Tagore started writing songs while the notation of music was composed by Jyotirindranath. Tagore's sister, Swarna Kumari, herself a poetess of eminence, also inspired him to compose songs.

## NEW EXPERIMENTS

After he returned from London, Rabindranath experimented with western tunes also. It was nothing new. D.L. Ray, the father of the eminent musician Dilip Kumar Ray, was already experimenting with European tunes. In fact he introduced a number of Italian tunes into Bengali songs. Ray's successful experiment inspired many other poets to compose music in western tune. It was the beginning of a new movement, an era of Tagore music, the creation of which was mightier even than the artist, which formed an epoch in the cultural history of India. "Music", noted Beethoven, "is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life. Although the spirit be not master of that which it



creates through music, yet it is based in this creation, which, like every creation of art, is mightier than the artist."

To Rabindranath, music was the fountainhead of joy of life. Without music, life was meaningless. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore noted:

"When grace is lost from life  
come with a burst of song."

Tagore's songs had a captivating power. He could keep the audience spell bound by his songs. *Rabindra Sangeet*, as Tagore's songs came to be popularly known, form a part of cultural life in India today. They are sung in every day incidents in social functions, marriage ceremonies, in prayer services and religious functions. They are popular background songs for almost all recent Bengali films. Though translated into all regional languages the tunes are however kept in tact.

## THE CLASSICAL TOUCH

Tagore's songs are based on Indian classical music. Tagore himself knew both Indian and Western music. Although he did not continue lessons from any particular master, he had the rare opportunity of listening to a number of master musicians both within and abroad. He preferred the classical Indian tune in his notations. "As a master of fact," noted Indira Devi, the poet's niece and an authority on Tagore's Songs, "it (music of Tagore) is firmly planted in the native soil of Indian classical music, which, the poet naturally imbibed from his very childhood, as his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore was a great patron of music and many famous mastersingers used to congregate in his house."

In most of his earlier compositions Tagore gave preference to the *dhrupad* tunes. They were mostly in praise of the Almighty and most of them used to be sung in the *Brahmo Samaj* prayers. Next to *dhrupad* his preference came to the *Kirtan* style. In these songs Tagore drew much inspiration from the works of the great Vaishnava masters like Vidyapati and Chandidas.

In these songs Tagore followed not only their tunes but

also their language. They were more like *Maithili* than Bengali proper.

## BAUL

Next to *dhrupad* and *Kirtan*, Tagore popularised the *baul* types. *Baul* has been a folk tune sung by the wandering bards in Bengal village. *Ektara* or an instrument made of a single string served the main accompaniment of the *baul* songs. The wordings are very simple and high philosophies of life are described in the easiest way. It would seem that Tagore's direct touch with cultivators of Bengal (while looking after his estate in Bengal village) gave him an opportunity to acquaint himself with the folk songs of those people. A number of songs composed on the house-boat *Padma* (where he stayed for a long time) were influenced by the *baul* style. From childhood, Tagore was influenced by the mystic touch and tune of the *baul* songs. It was no wonder that his intimate contact with the village folk reiterated his love for these village songs.

Tagore popularised this *baul* style particularly during the Swadeshi movement when he composed a number of patriotic songs in *baul* tune. Tagore's love for folk music, particularly this *baul* type had a tremendous significance in the history of revival of folk songs of India. According to Indira Devi, "This taste for folk music remained with him till the end, and manifested itself in a variety of ways and may be said to constitute one of the distinctive features of Tagore's music as such."

Although there cannot be any rigid classification of his innumerable songs, Tagore himself divided his songs (in *Gitabitan*) into five categories : *Puja* (Devotional), *Prem* (Love Lyrics), *Prakriti* (Nature), *Swadesh* (Patriotic Songs) and *Bibhidha* (miscellaneous).

It would be interesting to note that the tunes of all these songs were in keeping with the subject matter. Thus, whereas a song on the Motherland (Swadesh group) had a tone of valour and vigour, a devotional piece was set with a soft tone with humility and modesty. *Jana Gana Mana*, the National Anthem of India, composed and tuned by Tagore has been successfully adapted for the band. The harmonious tune won

appreciation from the west connoisseurs of music. Tagore also gave notations to Bankim Chatterjee's *Vande Mataram*, the famous national song of India. The poet himself sang that in a number of conferences.

The melodies of *Rabindra Sangeet* have definitely a universal appeal. Some of his songs have been published with European notations. Special mention may be made of a collection of songs with notation by Professor Arnold Bake of Holland published by the Music Guimet of Paris.

In any discussion of Tagore-songs one must remember the contribution of a great musician that was Dinendranath Tagore. A close relation of the poet, Dinendranath helped Tagore to write down the notations as composed by Rabindranath.

"Unfortunately the poet himself was not an adept in noting his own compositions, so that he had to depend on his musical disciples, not only for writing down but also for memorising the tunes set by him which he was apt to forget himself. Chief among these musical secretaries was his great-nephew, the late Dinendranath Tagore, who was a gifted musician himself and the 'custodian and controller of his songs as the poet himself described him. It was Dinendranath who was accredited with the transcription of most of Rabindranath's songs. While he was residing in Santiniketan, it became a well known fact that the poet used to rush to him as soon, as a song was completed in order to deposit it in safe custody: 'lest we forget'".

The modern annotators conducting research work on *Rabindra Sangeet* included Professor Santi Dev Ghosh of Visva-Bharati University and Mr. Jyotirindra Moitra of Sangeet Natak Akademy (National Academy of Song and Drama).

An attempt is also made to get the versions of *Rabindra Sangeet* in all regional languages. Faithful translations of some selected songs have been sung in regional languages like Marathi, Gujarati, Kashmiri. A number of songs have been translated into Hindi also. The All India Radio served *Rabindra Sangeet* in a number of regional languages as a special feature on Tagore's birth centenary celebrations. The most outstanding feature was the acceptance of the original notations. Tagore did

not favour any rigidity in any sphere but his strictness about his notations was proverbial.

There were/are musicians who have specialised in *Rabindra Sangeet* and these included Pankaj Mullick, Hemanta Mukherjee, Suchitra Mitra, Kanika Banerjee, Indulekha Ghosh, Santi Dev Ghosh and a host of others.

Tagore's music will ever guide humanity both in despair and pleasure. The Tagore songs are 'little dew drops of celestial melody' and they will certainly outlive all other works of the great poet.

## 20 | THE BAULS OF BENGAL— THEIR INFLUENCE ON TAGORE

Tagore revived many things thoroughly Indian, but in course of time lost in obscurity. *Baul* song contributed one such category, where Tagore's initiative was a renewed effort to retrieve a lost culture.

In the cultural history of India, the wandering bards occupy high place. Nowhere in the world one could find an ordinary wandering *durbesh* or *fakir* uttering such highest thoughts of human philosophy. These mystic wandering minstrels mostly sang self composed songs popularising the philosophy of renunciation—the highest teaching of Indian philosophy—from the *Gita* to Shankaracharya.

Many of them did not follow any particular sect or religion. There has yet been much similarity in their trend of thinking. The wandering bards mostly preached and practised the songs of Kabir, Nanak, Ravidas, Dadu, Meera in northern India. They leant towards Thyagaraja, Purandaradasa and Vallathol in south India. Ram Prasad Sen, Chandidas, Vidyapati, both *Shakta* and *Vaishnava* saintly poets were sung by the wandering bards in Bengal. The Bauls of Bengal constituted a sect by themselves. They did not stay at any particular place for a long time. Their main theme of approach to life was giving up all earthly allurements and materialistic attachments. Many of them believed in *yoga*. They derived their membership from both Hindus and Muslims. Their expressions were simple and lucid and their ideas clear cut and pierced



one's heart. A Baul and a Sufi are very near to each other emotionally. Most of the bauls hailed from "lower" caste. No historical account exists of these people. In eastern Bengal, Lalan Fakir was a popular exponent of Baul and had a large number of disciples. Next to Lalan, Chhaku Thakur of Vikrampur, Dacca, was a well known Baul.

It has still not been known how and when many of the bauls migrated near Santiniketan. It was given an international status in human philosophy when the poet referred to it specially as a medium of perfect divine bliss in his Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford at Manchester College, in 1930. This was later published in his *The Religion of Man*.

The main emphasis of Bauls has been on unity of mankind through love. This can be done only by renunciation because it was greed for material expropriation that stood in the way of human love.

Narahari, a master Baul singer has given a vivid account of the typical simple way of living by a Baul. In one of his verses, he wrote:

"That is why, brother I became a mad cap  
Baul. No master I obey, nor injunction,  
Canons or custom. Nor no men-made  
distinctions have any hold on me. And I revel  
only in the gladness of my own willing love.  
In love there is no separation, but  
so I rejoice in song and dance always  
with each and all".

The Bauls of Bengal can easily be recognised from their appearance. They allow hair and beard and moustache to grow freely. They believe in covering the whole body. Tagore's love for long robe, beard, moustache and hair was perhaps due to the influence of Baul. Incidentally not only that the poet composed songs in the typical Baul style, he himself participated in baul performances.

The baul singer, with his long hair, beard, dressed in long robe with beads around the neck, obviously in Saffron, the symbol of renunciation combined rhythm and tune. He sang to

the accompaniment of a single string instrument known as *Ektara*. Baul has been, by and large, one of the sweetest folk songs of India. The village folk need to wait for the bard to come with his melody, satire and deep message of love.

In his *The Religion of Man*, Tagore gave some details about the *Bauls*. Quoting from Acharya Kshitimohan Sen Sashty, the poet wrote, "The Baul cult is followed by house-holders as well as homeless wanderers, neither of whom acknowledge class or caste, special deities, temples or sacred places. Though they congregate on the occasion of religious festivals, mainly of the Vaishnavas, held in special centres, they never enter any temple. They do not set up any images of divinities or religious symbols, in their own places of worship or mystic realization. True, they sometimes maintain with care and reverence spots sacred to some esteemed master or devotee, but they perform no worship there. Devotees from the lowest strata of the Hindu and Moslem communities are welcomed into their race; hence the bards are looked down upon by both. It is possible that their own contempt for temples had its origin in denial of admittance therein to their low class brethren. What need, say they, have we of other temples, is not this body of ours the temple where the Supreme Spirit has His abode? The human body, despised by most other religious, is, thus for them the holy of holies, wherein the Divine is intimately enshrined as the Man of the Heart. And in this wise is the dignity of Man upheld by them."

This lofty ideal of the Bauls endeared itself to the poet who lost no time to present it to the international arena. This was one step forward in international understanding of man preached and practised by the Bauls with a tradition of hundreds of years deeply rooted in the soil of India.

There are quite a number of institutions in Bengal devoted to the task of revival of Baul folklore. A modern Baul has incorporated into his performance not only the message of love preached by his earlier masters. He would find it entertaining and lively by blending humour and social satire to his message. A modern Baul, for instance, will present the audience, his personal comments on a modern lady's hair style, her dress or her daily movements. He will neither spare the mod male

counterpart. It would indeed be a treat to listen to a Baul's soul stirring verve and sonorous satire, a really good Baul from Bengal. The deep emotional fervour certainly leaves a delicate effect on the mind of the audience. It has genuinely been a melody that represented the soul of village India.

The tune is typical and resonant. One has to cultivate a Robsonian voice to pick up Baul choreography. Many songs are now being composed in the popular folk style.

From his early childhood, Rabindranath developed a distaste for modern system of education in India. The dull and drab monotony of the classroom could not win the heart of the young student Rabindranath. He got almost suffocated there and literally ran away from the school. He refused to be 'educated' in any formal school. Recording the memories of school days Rabindranath wrote, "we had to sit inert, like dead specimens of some museum, while lessons were pelted at us from on high, like hailstones on flowers."

The 'uncomfortable' memories of the class-rooms haunted him like a nightmare. Somehow he could not forget them even years after leaving the school. In a speech delivered on the eve of opening the Visva-Bharati University, Tagore said "I recall it, the classroom, gaping each morning like a big mouth, its bare walls, its wooden benches, its wooden desk at which the teacher stood giving his lesson like a living phonograph. I still know it by heart, and can hear it, the repetition of the same, which had neither the beauty of melody nor rhythm, which every morning we chanted in chorus on the wooden verandah of the school before entering the class. It spoke of many good things no doubt, that it was necessary to be wise, not to steal, nor borrow. But it was, nevertheless, a bad beginning for the day."

It was little surprise that the poet could not acquire a university degree. Although he had the best of education from

private tutors and private study, there were critics to question his knowledge even when he earned fame both within the country and abroad.

Why did Rabindranath develop such a contempt for modern education? Why did he revolt time and again against the existing education? Tagore himself gave the reply by opening his ideal school at Santiniketan, the nucleus of the famous Visva Bharati University. Tagore, in his innumerable speeches and writings made it clear that the modern system of education in India was defective in many ways. A young student must cultivate the habit (with is already there in his instinct) of appreciating beauty through the contact of living nature. The surrounding, the environment must allow them to move and grow freely.

### TAPOVAN

The poet perhaps drew inspiration from the ancient Indian system of education where a *Brahmachari* was to have lessons from his guru in a *Tapovan*. The constant touch of living nature in the *Tapovan* or the forest school inspired the students to grow in freedom and joy. "One leading principle, and one only emanates from my ideas: Go to meet life where it is supreme. Come out of the school room. Do not bring the trees into the classroom. Take the classes out under the trees. Undoubtedly it is easy to have a tree trunk in the school room, it can be cut up into planks, but these planks are dead, it is not in the classroom that the tree will bear flowers and fruit."

To Rabindranath every work of a human being was guided by a spontaneous rhyme and a rhythm. He liked the western 'playway'. Education through play was an ideal method. Tagore emphasised on freedom and self-discipline.

A mechanical discipline without joy never helped a student to attain his personality. Without joy and freedom it became cramped and thwarted. That was why the modern system of education assigns an important place to sports, song, dance and drama. This also gives a rare opportunity to the student to get together. Freedom and joy are there: at the same time strict discipline should reign supreme.



## BRAHMACHARYA

An ideal student life—which in Indian terminology is known as *Brahmacharya*—must be well versed with the spirit of appreciation of beauty. Freedom, joy and appreciation of beauty make a man perfect. That has been the reason why in Santiniketan equal emphasis has been laid on teaching dance and music. By learning dance a man cultivates self-discipline. While appreciating the poet's emphasis on teaching dance, one would like to quote Johnson who said, "The chief benefit of dancing is to learn one how to sit still."

During the *Swadeshi Movement* there was an attempt to Indianise the system of education. Eminent scholars, reformers and political leaders formed a National Council of Education with a view to starting a parallel university. Rabindranath found that the new move to start a National University in imitation of the existing one would bear no fruit.

In his preface of *Sikhsar Andolan* he made it clear that it was unwise to boycott the universities all of a sudden as a protest against the alien rulers. Patience and friendly feelings were needed to have the modest beginning of a new system of education. Like a prophet he could see that the temporary excitement of countrymen, particularly students to boycott the existing system of education overnight would lead them nowhere. Tagore preferred to work calmly and silently for his school. In a letter to Ramendra Sunder Trivedi he said, "even if the number and influence of such men be greater we must (not join them and) concentrate on our work silently."

## A BRIDGE

Pointing to a few basic and fundamental defects in the British system of education in India, Rabindranath observed that it was "dividing India into two—past and present. The person who will link them together as a bridge will save us." And who brought that link? Was it not Tagore himself who brought about a happy blending between the two—the Western

and the ancient Indian systems of education ? He took the best of the two systems.

Theoretical knowledge would be useless unless it has been applied in everyday life. Unfortunately in Indian universities too much emphasis has been given on theoretical knowledge which has hardly any bearing on everyday life. Unless a link is established between university education and the country's needs, the education would become absolutely futile. If it (university education) became devoid of reality, however good it may be, it will always leave our mind, heart and thoughts crippled and imperfect. Another interesting theory that Tagore advanced was the futile attempt to impart the same type of education in the village and in the city. Education to him, would be the best medium of any village reconstruction work. In any plan of community development the top-most priority should be accorded to primary education. But this primary education must be different in a village as distinct from a city.

## RURAL UNIVERSITIES

Rural Universities are gradually growing up. And the village centres of social education are concentrating more on agricultural education, moral hygiene and local administration. Research is being conducted in socio-economic problems of cultivators, their field, their farm and seed.

Today a study of ethnology would be certainly different in any of these centres. Students come in close touch with the people of different tribes, different castes and creeds. They get practical training. In a number of speeches and articles on education (e.g., *Sikhsar Milon*, *Sikhsar Her Pher*, *Sikhsar Bahan*) Rabindranath stressed the utter uselessness of taxing the young student's mind with too many subjects most of which are far from interesting.

"For me, indeed", wrote Rabindranath, "a child upto his twelfth year lives much more in the subconscious than in clear consciousness and what is important during these first years is not to burden his memory with knowledge which taxes his

mind, but to see that his sub-conscious is saturated with beauty through the contact of living nature." In his school at Santiniketan he never taught anything but languages and literature. While talking of language, he always preferred the mother tongue to start with. In *Sikhsar Her Pher* he was very critical of student's "struggle with a foreign language" when through his mother-tongue he could learn it in a much easier way.

## TEACHERS' LOVE

Special emphasis was laid on a cordial relation between the teachers and the taught. Without love and sympathy a man cannot be a good teacher. This was the secret of Rabindranath's great success as an educator. The institution which started with five students, decades ago, became a symbol of ideal education all the world over only because the poet founded it with bricks of cordiality and intimate relation. Tagore knew that he was successful as an educator and he was justly proud of it. "When I teach anything, I always do it with love. I put myself heart and soul into it." It must be known to all that in Santiniketan the relation between a student and a teacher is most informal. Some teachers are addressed as "uncle," some as "brother". Rightly did Emerson once observe, "The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil !"

## BROADER OUTLOOK

The real aim of education would be defeated if it failed to give a broader outlook to life. The world university of India fulfilled the dream of Tagore to impart that education to students from different parts of the world.

"The more purely intellectual aim of education," once observed Bertrand Russell, "should be the endeavour to make us see and imagine the world in an objective manner as far as possible as it really is in itself, and not merely through the distorting medium of personal desires." Was it not an echo of the voice of Rabindranath who advised his students to keep the windows of their mind open and free? "Fanaticism is

death to the human mind. Think of man as a member of the great community of mankind, and never, never as the member of a caste or a community or a nation or a race." There lies the quintessence of the close nexus between education and human understanding.

Rabindranath Tagore can rightly be described as the visionary of modern India. *Gurudev Tagore*, as he was affectionately called, symbolised the creative Vision of India. He was closely associated with the Indian National Movement from the very beginning. His contribution to the growth of nationalism has three dimensions. First, he resurrected the creative elements in Indian culture through his literature. Secondly, he conceived of a new educational pattern. Thirdly, he widened the mental horizons of India and gave it a world outlook, a humanist philosophy modern to the core. Tagore's *Gitanjali* for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 symbolised his creative urges. Santiniketan has been the monument of his educational system and Viswa Bharati had shown the dimension and direction of his world outlook.

### THE SPIRITUAL MOORINGS AND NATIONALISM

Rabindranath inherited the spiritual legacy of his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore who was deeply influenced by *Upanishadic* thoughts. Tagore was closely associated with the Indian National Movement from the very beginning. He took active part in the first two sessions of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1886 and 1896. In 1896 Tagore presented *Vande Mataram* in his own tune to the originally composed



song by Bankim Chandra, first appearing in his famous novel *Anandamath*. Those were the days of *Swadeshi Andolan* in Bengal during the beginning of the present century that stirred the whole of India. Tagore composed 2200 songs; more than one fourth of which have been devoted to the Motherland in one way or the other. He gave a new patriotic connotation to the songs on the festivals, connecting them to the problems of his time. In his song on the festival of *Rakhi* he spoke on communal harmony. In his poem on Shivaji he accorded a national pedestal to Shivaji by describing him as a national hero. In *Ekla Chalo*, the poet has reflected the experiences and experiments of the past ancient sages and seers and insisted on concentration. In another piece of Indian Culture he has recorded, "He alone sees, who sees all beings as himself" which reflected the substance of *Vedanta*. One of his best pieces on vision of India has perhaps been *Bharat Tirtha*, first published in *Gitanjali* (original in Bengali only). In his oft quoted poem, Rabindranath has given a bird's eye-view of the entire history of Indian culture—the core of it being unity in diversity. Scholars compare it with Robert Browning's "Better pursue a pilgrimage through ancient and through modern times . . . ." Never before was the spirit of India—the spirit of co-existence, tolerance and love—described so skilfully in single poem.

## VILLAGE FESTIVALS

He introduced village festivals or *melas*, organising *Briksha-Ropan Utsavas* or Festivals of planting trees and popularising *Pous Mela* or harvest festivals. Tagore has definitely preferred the peaceful prosperous village life to a busy city life with all its stresses and strains. He lived in the quiet remote village-Santiniketan, Bolepur in Birbhum district.

'Back to village' was a popular slogan by great national leaders, of whom Tagore was a pioneer. This was a deeply significant move. The poet was convinced that however modern or prosperous life a city might offer, the secret of prosperity of the nation depended on village only.

This would require further detailed discussion. Rabindranath had played a unique role in reshaping the face of modern

India. In fact, the preceptor of modern India, *Gurudev*, as he was affectionately called, Rabindranath Tagore played a dynamic role in the liberation movement not only through his innumerable patriotic songs and long articles in noted Indian journals but he physically participated in the *Swadeshi Andolan* in Bengal during the beginning of the present century that stirred the whole of India. It was mainly with the intention of Indianisation of handicraft industry that he started the famous Crafts Centre of Sriniketan side by side with his new university at Santiniketan. Among his twenty two hundred songs more than one fourth were on the Motherland in one way or the other. He was a great prince among patriots and never compromised with alien rulers as far as freedom was concerned.

His patriotic songs, composed during the *Swadeshi* days, were on the lips of almost all. It exercised a far-reaching impact on building up national consciousness throughout the country. Tagore's songs, equally inspired the freedom fighters in Bangladesh.

### THE POET'S VISION

Tagore had a unique vision of India, an India completely standing on her own—cultural, social and political self-reliance. He noted:

"India has proved that it has its own mind, which has been deeply concerned to solve according to its light the problems of existence. India's aim in education is to enable this mind to fulfil its quest in its own individual way.

For this purpose the mind of India must become organised and self-aware; then only will it accept education from its teachers in the right spirit, assess it by its own standard of values, and make use of it by its own creative power."

(*Towards Universal Man*, p. 202)

Rabindranath had a wider vision. As early as the beginning of the present century, Tagore thought of self-reliance and village development programmes. In 1904, Tagore wrote in

*Swadeshi Samaj*, "The core of India lies in her villages. The problems of these villages are the problems of India. India will progress only when you can bring new life to these villages." Rabindranath had total confidence in development of rural crafts and handicrafts and himself started a Training Centre at Sriniketan, where special emphasis was laid on crafts. He sent his students to Japan in the beginning of this century to specialise in these arts. Tagore insisted on individual efforts to develop society. He wrote, "Indians are trying to transfer more and more of their duties to the State. They are allowing even our social customs to be framed by alien rulers. There lies the fundamental weakness of our society."

Tagore must have been much inspired by the fiery writings of Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, a great Marathi writer who used to write in Bengali and whose *Desher Daak* was proscribed by the British Government.

Through innumerable songs Tagore expressed his deepest love for the motherland. He joined with new patriotic songs the festival of *Rakhi* a new symbol of communal harmony. He introduced *Shivaji Utsav* and gave glimpses of his vision of India in his famous poem on Shivaji. His *Ekla Chalo Ray*, *Sonar Bangla*, *Desher Mati*, *Hobai hobay*, *Dvidha*, *Abhay*, *Matri Murti*, *Baan*, *Matri Griha* were some of the beautiful pieces that gave glimpses of his vision of India.

In another piece in *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath whipped the conservative reactionary forces that were responsible for creating hatred and narrow casteism, particularly among Hindus. He noted India must repent for the injustice done to the so-called backward members of society. Some scholars were tempted to compare this famous poem with the oft-quoted lines of Emerson "You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong."

Tagore's *Jana Gana*, the national song of India gave a clear vision of the poet. He wrote,

"I proclaimed, in the *Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka* song, the victory of the dispenser of India's Destiny who chariots eternally the travellers through the ages along the paths rugged with the rise and fall of nations—of Him who dwells within the hearts of men and leads the multitudes."

Perhaps the most significant piece which reflected the poet's vision of India has been in *Gitanjali* where the poet visualised an India,

"WHERE the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the depth of the truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action— Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

Tagore never wanted Indian educational pattern to follow a western model. He did not believe in closed compartmentalisation of mind only to class rooms and the pages of the text books. He observed:

"We in the East have had to arrive at our own solution of the problems of life. We have, as far as possible, made our food and clothing unburdensome; our climate has taught us to do so. We require the openings in walls more than the walls themselves. Lights and air have more to do without clothes than the weaver's loom. The sun produces in us the energy which elsewhere is gained from food. All these natural advantages have moulded our life to a particular shape, which I cannot believe it will be profitable to ignore in the case of our education."

(*Towards Universal Man*, p. 206)

Lack of communication has been one of the basic defects of modern educational system. There exists a big communication gap between the students and teachers.

Tagore wrote:

"Communication of life is possible only through a living agency. And culture, which is the life of the mind, can be



imparted only through man to man. Book-learning simply turns us into pedants. It is static and quantitative; it accumulates and is hoarded under strict guard. Culture grows and moves and multiplies itself in life."

(*Ibid.*, p. 209)

That has been the reason why in his own University of Visva Bharati at Santiniketan, Tagore gave maximum attention to the close contact between the teachers and the taught. He himself took personal interest in all the students individually. There was informal and close cordial relation among the students and the teachers.

### TAGORE'S NATIONALISM

Tagore had a unique vision of India, an India completely standing on her own cultural, social and political principles. Tagore's concept of Indian Nationalism had a cultural content.

Tagore was conscious of the great diversity of India's culture and of the need to conserve elements of value in a harmonious synthesis.

He said, "the inmost creed of India is to find the one in the many, unity in diversity. India does not admit difference to be in conflict, nor does she espy an enemy in every stranger. So she repels none, destroys none, and strives to find a place for all in a vast social order. She acknowledges every path and recognizes greatness wherever she finds it. Since India has this genius for unification, we do not have to fear imaginary enemies. We may look forward to our own expansion as the final result of each new struggle. Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian shall not die fighting on Indian soil; here they will find harmony."

(*Towards Universal Man*, pp. 65-66)

### WIDER CULTURAL OUTLOOK

He compared Indian culture to a river in which many streams have joined. Tagore stressed the need of coordinating



the study of different cultures, "the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh and the Zoroastrian. And side by side with them the European for only then shall we be able to assimilate it. A river flowing within banks is truly our own, but our relations with a flood are fraught with disaster."

(*Ibid.*, pp. 223-224)

Tagore thought that culture was the life of the mind. Like life, culture grows, moves and multiplies itself. This was the reason why Tagore's cultural vision was wide and all-embracing.

The poet's vision of India was a sweet one blended with eternal joy which came through a spirit of self-sacrifice and touch of affection and love. He did not believe even in spiritual salvation.

In one of his immortal songs Tagore wrote,

*Bairagya sadhanay mukteesay amar noy,  
asankhya bandhan majhay lobhibo muktir swaad.*

"DELIVERANCE is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of the wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love".

This represented the real soul of Indian culture and philosophy. That also accounted for why renowned saints and seers like Buddha and Sankara, even after their own salvation, went from door to door to preach the message of love and universal brotherhood of man.

Tagore, through his plays challenged the traditional rituals and always opposed superstitions and violence. He was strongly against caste system. *Chandalika*, a beautiful interlocutory dance

drama depicted how a low caste girl was despised by all but finally honoured by a Buddhist monk. In *Sacrifice* the poet playwright has discouraged animal sacrifice before the deity.

"*Sacrifice (Bisarjan)* is perhaps one of the best dramas in the world literature. A great oriental scholar once said *Sacrifice* was the "greatest drama in Bengali literature." All these dramas are vehicles of thought rather than expression and they show the poet's mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its ritual of bloody sacrifice. The dramas also show how the poet was emancipating himself from the tangles of the solely artistic aims and life. *Sacrifice* shows how greatly we slander external truth."

In his *Oikatan* (Orchestra) Tagore has clearly singled himself out as a national poet who could reflect the hopes and aspirations of the masses. Rabindranath's India was much beyond the boundaries of the physical land. For him any citizen of the world was his near one. He wrote,

*My heart doth weep,  
To mingle with the hearts of  
Humanity deep.*

Keeping with the tradition of Indian culture—*basudhoibo Kutumbakam* (the whole world is my family)—Rabindranath was, by and large, a citizen of the world. He said, *sob thain more ghar achhay ami sai ghar mori khunjia*. Though Tagore was a citizen of the world, he was patriotic to the core. Describing the role of Tagore, Dr. Radhakrishnan in his book on *The Philosophy of Tagore* recorded,

"In the true sense of the word he is a national poet. India fills his heart as nothing else does. He sees what India wants, and tells us what exactly it is. He sees the inward agonising of the Indian soul, understands the passions and doubts surging in her mind, wishes to deliver her from the travail through which she is passing, and give her peace of

soul. The joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the doubts and beliefs of the Indian life are captured in his books. Adapting Johnson, we might say that the work of Rabindranath abounds in sentiments to which every Indian bosom returns an echo. He gives voice to the doubts which are darkening the once glorious faith of India."

Time and again Tagore stressed,

*O amar desher mati*  
*Tomar Kolay thekai matha*  
 Oh my Motherland,  
 I bow and touch my head on thy lap.

Tagore's vision of India has been the happiest blending of the best of the eastern and the western thoughts, culture and ideals. He was more respected by the western intellectuals, philosophers and social pathfinders. W.B. Yeats, William Rotheinstein, C.F. Andrews, W.W. Pearson and many were among his personal friends and admirers. But the poet did not move an inch from the Indian mooring. He gave the highest consideration to the cultural heritage of India in the typical manner as perhaps any ancient sage would have given. That was why he has been so affectionately and fondly remembered as *Gurudev*, the preceptor of India.

Tagore's vision of India stands supremely majestic. He has described the great Motherland as a Holy Pilgrimage. He has noted:

"On the shores of *Bharat*,  
 Where men of all races have come together,  
 Awake, O my Mind:  
 Standing here with outstretched arms,  
 I send my salutation to the God of Humanity,  
     solemn chant sing His praises,  
 At whose call no one knows,  
 Came floating streams of men,  
 And merged into the sea of *Bharat*,  
 The Aryan, the Non-Aryan, the Dravidian,

The Huns, the Pathans and the Moghuls—  
 They all have merged here into one body,  
 Today the West has opened its doors,  
 And from thence come gifts,  
 Giving and taking.  
 All will be welcome on the shores of *Bharat*,  
 Where men of all races have come together.”

## CONTACT WITH NATIONAL LEADERS

Tagore was in direct touch with the top most national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. He described the latter as “the prince among patriots”. He regularly participated in the sessions of Indian National Congress and presented his songs. Many sessions got inaugurated by his song. Tagore could sing himself beautifully. He himself gave a tune to *Vande Mataram* and a Congress session was inaugurated with that melodious tune.

## TAGORE AND INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. Rabindranath was closely associated with the organisation right from the beginning. At the initial stage the Congress session used to be restricted only to three to four hundred member delegates. He served this historic body not only by presenting stirring songs but also in its proceedings and deliberations.

Rabindranath took active part in all the Sessions held in Calcutta.

Some of his songs were sung with the accompaniment of bands. One such song was:

*Desha desha nandita kori mondrita taba bheri,  
 Asilo jato bir brinda asana tabo gheri  
 Dina agata oi, Bharata tobu koi,  
 say ki rohilo supta aji jago jana paschatay  
 Louk viswa karma bhar mili sabar sathay  
 Prerana karo bhairaba taba durjoy ahban hay  
 Jagrata Bhagaban hay, Jagrata Bhagahan.*

## JAGRATA BHAGABAN

This *Jagrata Bhagaban* has been the *destiny* of India. In many of his poems and songs, Tagore referred to this *Jagrata Bhagaban* or *Bharat Bhagya Vidhata*. He had tremendous faith in this great *destiny* of India and repeatedly prayed to Him for inspiring the whole Nation to awake from long slumber.

The second session of Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta in December 1886. Tagore composed the special song "*amra milechhi aaj mayer dakey*" (we have gathered today at the call of Mother) on this occasion. This was the inaugural song of the All India Session of Congress held in Calcutta. Four hundred delegates were present.

(For more details refer Prhbbhat Mookherjee in his *Rabindra Jibani* in four volumes year-wise)

In December 1896 another session of Indian National Congress, presided over by Rahimatullah Mohammad Siyani, was inaugurated by Tagore's melodious voice. It was Rishi Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Vande Mataram*. The poet himself had given a sonorous tune and sang in a vigorous melody. During those days there was no microphone. The song could be heard from a long distance. It has been recorded that Tagore had also presented *Vande Mataram* in his own original tune.

Tagore was more interested in the reconstruction programme and educational policy of the Indian National Congress to liberate the Motherland. He was given charge of framing a national education plan along with Rashbehari Bose by Annie Besant, the then Congress President.

On December 27, 1935 Tagore felicitated the Indian National Congress on its Golden Jubilee. Tagore wrote to Babu Rajendra Prasad, the then Congress President, "My warmest greetings on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. The *destiny* of India has chosen as its ally the power of soul and not that of muscle. And she is to raise the history of man from the muddy level of physical conflicts to a higher moral attitude."

(*Visva Bharati Quarterly*, May, 1935, p. 112)



Tagore's vision of India, by and large, was in keeping with the highest thoughts of Indian Culture. One must remember, the world poet was trained in his childhood by his illustrious father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, a great spiritual leader of modern India. Devendranath gave highest priority to the Upanishads' thoughts. In almost all the spiritual songs, prayers for his country's prosperity there was a permanent imprint of this great mystic scripture. Everywhere we find a touch of renunciation, selfless service, deep love for all human beings, a spirit of compassion and compatriotism as the main theme of his message. His philosophical ideas were deeply influenced by the Buddha, Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. Confined with the higher values, as propounded in the Upanishads, in Tagore's philosophy could also be clearly visible the noble thoughts of the Prophets of peace and universal brotherhood of man. Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed all influenced the world poet. His close association with the western philosophies, mystic poets and scholars and his visit to those countries gave him a wider view of life and he religiously studied the background of their faith and belief. Tagore represented the catholicity of Indian Culture and in his wisdom got together some of the topmost men of learning of different views gathered in his University at Santiniketan. That was also a rare occasion of briefing himself for the wider vision of India. His love for the great prince prophet Buddha was spontaneous. His love for equality was obviously clear in the daily prayer song of his *ashram*. The ideas of equality were just literal translation of a famous hymn in *Rig Veda* (*Samono akuto* etc.).

Tagore's mind did not restrict his vision only within the four walls of his country. His heart bled for the developing countries in the far-flung areas. His clarion call, along with his Japanese philosopher artist friend Okakura, *Asia is One* has today become a reality. His vision for a rising Asia was taking a concrete shape. Similarly, his sympathy and deep agony for Africa was clearly reflected in his famous poem entitled *Africa*. A properly developed India should not think of Indians alone. They must take into consideration the progress of humanity as

a whole. Tagore's warning against arm's race as boldly expressed in his famous piece *Crisis in Civilisation*, has been so relevant even today, fifty years after its original publication. India do not stand for conflict. The eternal message of India has been peace and the poet was a harbinger of that great message. Peace has been the goal of human progress. The poet exhorted his countrymen to live in peace instead of running after material prosperity. In his famous play *Red Oleanders (Rakta Karabi)* the poet decried mechanisation of human beings. In the din and bustle of stress and strain, we must not lose proper human values. And yet he was modern to the core. In *Tasher Desh*, the poet gave a clarion call to shatter the outworn social orders. In *Bunch bhengay dao* song he heralded the dawn of a new social order.

Tagore's vision was so wide, so adjustable, so deeply harmonious because they carried the undying message of the ancient pathfinders. The poet supplemented them with the modern scientific ideas. "They are eternal. They are universal."

Rabindranath believed that India could march ahead only when the spirit of Indian culture has been properly spread among one and all. He placed priority on human values. This was in keeping with the tradition of the ancient spiritual pathfinders. Tagore was totally secular in his thinking. In his famous poem on India—*The Pilgrimage*, he welcomed all Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists who formed a harmonious team. Tagore's conception of new India was echoed in the *Jara Gana Mana*—Indian national anthem. Tagore had also portrayed in his *Gitanjali* in greater detail, the freedom he aspired for. He wanted the mind to be "without fear" and knowledge to be "free". He prayed to God to carry India into the haven of freedom, "My Father, let my country awake." Tagore wanted India to have its own mind to solve its own problems in its light. For this purpose, he said, "The mind of India must be recognised and be self-aware." This was Tagore's vision of India.

Today in international conferences and seminars, on stage and universities we are talking of co-operation and co-existence. We are talking about unity among nations. The poet could anticipate all these scenes. In his vision he saw a strong united Asia. More than six decades ago, he dreamt of holding the Asian countries together.

Tagore was, by and large, a citizen of the world. His concept of universal man has been very clearly mirrored in the masterly analysis in the book *Towards Universal Man* edited by late Prof. Humayun Kabir. In the objectives towards founding the University of Santiniketan also, Tagore very clearly explained that his idea to found the institution was to cultivate a very intimate relation between man and man.

In his numerous poems and writings he has translated the same vision. He was, by and large, a humanist and recognised as a poet all over the world. He had an idea also to bring mankind closer and it was also his intention to bridge the gulf of difference between nation and nation.

In his personal contacts with the people of different countries, particularly of the West, he stood as a world poet that he was. He raised his voice on innumerable occasions whenever he saw injustice done or atrocity committed on humanity in Africa. In his heart of hearts, he sustained a deep feeling and limitless sympathy for the people of Asian countries. He visited many of these countries himself with his learned disciples

who accompanied him sometime as personal assistants, sometime as students. Tagore's many discussions with builders of new society in Asian countries gave him a first-hand account and he saw by himself, how these newly awakened societies in Asia were marching ahead with a new promise. This had given him a new ray of hope for the emancipation of the people of the vast region with a deeply rich cultural and literary background. Their miseries however saddened him.

Tagore knew not only the great scholars and litterateurs of these countries and the people but he also respected their literary pursuits with which he was in direct touch with the students who were brought on invitation to stay and build up special cells in Visva-Bharati University representing their respective countries. The very fact that Tagore was one of the first to have a big centre at *China Bhavan* in Santiniketan showed clearly his deep and affectionate regard and eagerness of exploring truth on this great eastern sub-continent. Certainly his knowledge of Asian philosophers and his intimate contact with the literary heritage of Asia had left in him a curiosity for exploring deeper knowledge and collect the maximum that was essential to build up a university of international standard.

Similarly, after visiting the Soviet Union, he appreciated very much the new economic progress and prosperity in this great country and his masterly work as vividly expressed in different letters published from Russia showed his appreciation of the new rising Asian countries.

Tagore had visited many of the Asian countries. He visited Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Malaya, Java, Bali, besides Soviet Union, China and Japan. Some of these countries he visited even more than once. The West's lust for power, materialistic gain had certainly disappointed the poet. The Asian countries had one thing of the poet's dream. That was the humanistic approach. Dignity for man, proper human values, social justice and above all, mutual respect for each other were principal constituents of a new social order of Tagore's dream which he wanted to see in the growing Asian countries.

His direct contact with the Asian countries certainly helped the poet to know the Asian people more intimately. It was not only Tagore who was thinking and dreaming of the idea—Asia



is one—, it was the concept of the great Japanese philosopher Okakura who was in touch with the poet and who was also dreaming of 'One Asia'.

### OKAKURA'S ASIA IS ONE

The great Japanese artist philosopher Okakura was a personal friend of the Poet. His works on Asian Unity had already stirred the imagination of many thinkers and reformers in the Asian countries. This learned scholar came to India and played an important role in rousing the consciousness of the Indian people. That was in the beginning of this century. So Japan had a special fascination for the poet.

### ON CHINA

Tagore told the people of China: "so long traders have come to China, so long adventurers and soldiers had come to China only to exploit. Now the poet is here, "because at the time of awakening he only proclaims that the winter that . . . . . keeps human races within closed doors . . . . . are going to open." Among those who accompanied the poet were Dr. Kalidas Nag, artist Nandlal Bose, and the great scholar Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen Sastri.

Critics raised points of doubt and suspicion on the object and purpose of the Poet's visit to East Asian countries. The poet could not be silenced. He explained "Age after age, in Asia, great dreamers have made the world sweet with the shower of their love. Asia is again waiting for such dreamers to come and cry on the work not of fighting, not of profit making but of establishing bonds of spiritual relationship.

(*Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, July 1924, p. 200)

Tagore insisted that it was not on ground of political exploitation or political platform that the Asian countries shall meet, but it would be for "disinterested human love and for nothing else" that they all soon will unite. It will be for better understanding, fellow feeling and friendship that these Asian



countries should come together. How true was the poet's vision and how relevant his thinking today. How prophetic was also the voice of the Poet!

### ASIAN MESSAGE OF HUMAN LOVE

In all his speeches before the learned intellectuals of the great Eastern countries Tagore insisted on the message of human love. The object was not to concentrate on material power and pomp but to stand on a bond of brotherhood and love. He enunciated the objective "not to acquire that mentality of the primitive man, the mentality of the west—eternally striving after power. The world was waiting for the moral idealism, for that spiritual standard of life to save it from that demon, the worship of power."

Intellectual and political thinkers of China were sceptic about the poet. They apprehended that he might be critical of the new movement. They were proved wrong. It was recorded, "the scholars and literary men of the Renaissance Movement in Peking were a little sceptical about the poet's philosophy and were not quite sure whether in his enthusiasm for old China he would not be somewhat of a reactionary. His first talk to them however won their hearts and minds. They happily found that the poet had all the time been as much of a revolutionary in the field of letters as any one of them.

The poet was greeted in the *Temple of Earth* where the old emperors of China used to hold courts. His theme of message to the youth of China was unity in Asia. He made it clear that he had not come as only a poet but as one representing Asian thoughts and culture. Rabindranath said, "you are glad that I have come to you as in a sense representing Asia, I feel myself that Asia has been waiting long and is still waiting to find her voice."

At the farewell address the poet said emphatically "there can be no real civilisation when the best ideals are concentrated in the hands of a few powerful men, whilst the bulk of the population has neither the leisure nor the mind to enjoy, and remains desolate."

He summed up his message: "Unless the whole people is

happy no individual can have true happiness. Unless all are wealthy, no man, however rich, can have real wealth . . . . I want to give the people the responsibility of their own destiny, so that through their self respect they may help themselves."

Tagore's deep regard for China was revealed in many of his writings. A few years before his death, the poet was bed-ridden for some time. Eminent people from China, Dr. Tsai Yuan Pei and Hou Tai-Chi Tao sent cables enquiring about his health. China which was during this period under attack from Japan, impelled the poet to say "My sympathy and the sympathy of our people is wholly with your country . . . . . I who have many friends in Japan feel grievously hurt that the brave people of Japan should be misled by their rulers into betraying the best ideals of the East and that we who should be loving them should now invoke their defeat that they may wake to their wrong."

A few weeks before his death, Tagore in a poem recalled the affectionate appreciation that he received from the leaders of the renaissance movement in China.

## ON JAPAN

Pained at Japan's onslaught on China the poet insisted on Japan to get rid of the chauvinistic spirit, "If you must have peace, you will have to fight the spirit of this demon, *Nation*. I have a deep love for you as a people but when as a nation you have your dealings with other nations you also can be deceptive, cruel and efficient in handling those methods in which the western nations show such mastery." Rabindranath wanted the Asian countries not to follow the western imperialistic powers and set up colonies.

As a result of the Poet's visit, the Asiatic Association was formed in Shanghai. It was an important event in the Asian unity front. *The Christian Science Monitor* (dated 3.10.1924) observed, "There is on foot an important movement to establish Asiatic concord through the common culture of Asiatic nations. It has been accentuated by the recent Japanese exclusion legislation in the United States and stimulated by the recent visit to the Far East of Rabindranath Tagore, who preached the doctrine of idealism opposed to western materialism.

"The new feeling is shown in the formation of Asiatic Association in the principal centres, the first of which is located in Shanghai. Its formation affected all the Far East, especially Japan. At the inauguration, representatives of all Asiatic countries were present.

"Inspiration for the movement is acknowledged to Tagore, whose teachings permeate the issued declarations."

Tagore's concept of Asian Unity had its echo in many countries including India where a few years later, Deshbandhu C.R. Das in his Presidential speech in the Indian National Congress pleaded for a conference of the Asian countries. Tagore was a pioneer in attempting to bring the Asian countries together with a deep bond of love and mutual respect. The dream came partially true when in 1947, the Asian Relations Conference was held in Delhi. An Indian daily recalled in its main editorial on May 11, 1947, that the Shanghai convention of 1924 was a predecessor to the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi 23 years later." Tagore revisited Japan in 1929. His appreciation of the challenge of Japan in reviving the eastern spirit was reflected in his statement: "I have ever wished that Japan is an aspect of civilisation which is generally ignored in other parts of the world. It should be greatly rich in the wealth of human relationship even in politics. The generosity in human relationship I claim as something special to the East."

Envisioning that education was to play the most important role in free Asian countries Tagore observed, "I try to assert in my words and works that education bears its only meaning and object in freedom—freedom from ignorance about the laws of universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world."

In Japan, Tagore met the great Indian revolutionary Rashbehari Bose who had gone to Japan under a pseudonym as P.N. Tagore.

## ON SOVIET RUSSIA

Tagore had a great yearning to visit the Soviet Union for a long time. The opportunity came in 1930. Tagore reached

Moscow on September 11, 1930. Among those who accompanied the Poet were Prof. Amiya Chakravarty, his Private Secretary, Miss Einstein, Soumendra Nath Tagore and others.

What attracted him the most there was the way in which the Soviet Union was treating her people. Equality was clearly evident everywhere. The poet saw in the Soviet Union a departure from other countries of exploitation of one class or section of people to thrive at the cost of a lesser fortunate section. "The new awakening of building up men at equal footing will certainly attract you. All these years civilisation has been witnessing a vast majority of people being exploited to build up one section of fortunate people at the cost of a vast majority who are treated as underdogs. It seemed as if these (exploited) people had no ambition or time to progress. They were left only with the desideratum of wealth of society. They had to toil the most but they got the least. Insult, dishonour were there only to add to their injury. They die of starvation without notice. They get shabby treatment from their employers. They are deprived of all opportunities of life. They are the lamp-stands on whose heads the lamps burn. Every body gets light from their head but they get only the darkness around them." Noticing the departure in the new social order in the Soviet Union Tagore was fascinated by the message of the *International*.

Wherever he went he was received with warmth and affection. "We who have taken part in the October Revolution and assisted at the construction of new forms of human culture, extend a warm welcome to one who has come amongst us as a profound thinker, to study our culture, study our strivings for the renewal of human society, and thus of human personality itself."

In his *Letter from Russia* Rabindranath gave fuller details of his appreciation of the new social order of planned production for community consumption in the Soviet Union.

## 24 | A BORN REBEL

A champion of the downtrodden, Tagore revolted time and again against the social injustice meted out to them. In his innumerable poems, speeches, novels and editorials, he uttered notes of warnings against the exploitation of the weak by the strong. He never missed any chance to stand against a wrong action, be it in his own beloved country or abroad. He often revolted against the rigid orthodoxies against conservative superstitions, the crumbling structure of society and the evil of casteism prevailing in his country for ages.

Though modern to the core of his heart, Rabindranath preferred the ancient system of education where the preceptor imparted education to his pupil in the natural environment of the forests, the *Tapovan*. This he highlighted in his world university of India. He did not mind going back to the ancient sages. He welcomed the natural surrounding and intimate contact between the teacher and the taught. He was convinced that students' direct contact with nature and the preceptor was as followed in the ancient *Ashrams* in the *Tapovans*—an impelling factor in preparing the students for life. But he was not *sacrosanct* of any thing and everything that the ancient system offered. Caste system was one such institution whose root felt the sharpness of his strong axe.

In ancient India the caste system was introduced perhaps on a scientific basis. With a view to having a proper division of labour, the law makers, divided members of society into four



distinct classes—the priests, the Brahmins or the clergies; the merchants or the Vaishas, the Kshatriyas or the Warriors; and the Shudras or the Menials. The priests were of the highest order. They were the law makers and dispensers. The warriors were to defend the country. The merchants carried on trade even with distant places. It was the fourth category that got exploited by all the three for centuries. Unfortunately, due to long servitude they became supine and lost the spirit of revolt. It was this class that evoked the greatest sympathy from Rabindranath.

In this famous poem *Apaman* or insult, published in the original Bengali edition of the *Gitanjali*, Tagore addressed his countrymen and said,

“Oh my country unfortunate,  
Those whom you have trampled down by your insult  
You will have to stoop down to their level.”

In this poem he struck a strong axe at the root of the time worn caste system, prevailing in the country. In this revolt, he was the first person to raise the banner. The political leaders and social reformers joined him much later. In 1935, Will Durant the great philosopher historian wrote, “Today he (Tagore) is a solitary figure, perhaps the most impressive of all men now on the earth: a reformer who has had the courage to denounce the most basic of India’s institutions—the caste system—and the dearest of her beliefs—transmigration.”

Tagore said, “Those whom you are keeping in the background under a veil of ignorance, are sounding your death-knell. These oppressed people, these exploited unfortunate creatures were the gods personified, turned out from the door of so-called civilised society. The reaction of this treatment was to echo in the suppressed hearts of the millions.”

The rebel poet exhorted the *Brahmins*, the law makers asking them to give these ignorant simpletons their due place in society. They must leave their pseudo superstitions, their vain and egoistic glory and superiority complex otherwise, their future, the poet warned, was doomed to destruction. He wanted justice in their every day treatment in society, justice

in political emancipation, justice in getting the light of knowledge. Tagore rejected any compromise with untruth and unjust work. To him the man who bowed down to injustice and tolerated it calmly would be equally guilty as the person who committed it.

In his prayer to the All powerful, Tagore appealed to the most righteous Supreme Being —

“He who commits an unjust act,  
And he who tolerates an unjust act calmly,  
Must be burnt by thy contempt like a tiny  
blade of grass.”

In *Ebar Phirao Moray* Tagore warned the exploited humanity to raise its voice of protest against all oppressions. There, he said it was only because the exploited humanity kept silent and tolerated calmly the torture and emboldened the tyrant to repeat his tyranny. By yielding to injustice a person degraded himself and turned into a coward. The tyrant has no ideals and has no moral support behind him. Intrinsically the tyrant being a coward cannot withstand any strong opposition. And ultimately he would lose the battle.

But how will this ignorant oppressed humanity gain consciousness? It would be only through a battle against illiteracy that will solve their problem. Tagore ushered in a bloodless revolution. It was a battle against illiteracy, against ignorance, poverty and rigidities of social structure. He wanted the oppressed to come forward and march along with the progress of humanity. To the world he proclaimed:

“Humanity oppressed must live again  
With food, with life,  
With light, with air,  
With strength, with health; with joy  
A robust heart full of courage  
Free of fear  
In the misery of today  
Though Poet, bring me divine faith.”

He said :

"To these ignorant melancholy dumb faces  
We shall have to give language."

Tagore wanted to bring to them a new message of hope and inspiration. They must awake from their long slumber.

## REVOLT AGAINST WRONG RELIGIOUS NOTIONS

The worshippers of the Goddess of War had an ancient custom of sacrificing a goat before the *Kali*. The goat was supposed to be a symbol of passion. And the devotees considered that by sacrificing the animal they could win the blessings of the Mother. The poet, somehow could not appreciate the significance of this bloody sacrifice. In a country that stood through ages for preaching omnipresence of the all powerful Supreme Being, in a country whose whole philosophy can be summed in one word—"Universal love"—the rite of sacrifice before the Mother of the universe seemed to be self-contradictory. *Bisarjan*, or Sacrifice was written and staged with this end in view. In this play Tagore had shown how the love of a poor girl Aparna won over the mighty force of Raghupati and the superstitious masses. In this protest against evil social custom Tagore uttered, "Love has no army, no money—but in the secret font of the heart it goes on getting strength."

## REVOLT AGAINST MACHINE AGE

Tagore was a naturalist *par excellence*. He could not appreciate the lust for materialistic power. During his travels within and particularly abroad he was startled at humanity running after mammon. The poet revolted against the machine age. In one of his symbolic dramas 'Red Oleander', the poet vented his reaction to it.

In this piece, the poet depicted the picture of a gold mine. The poor miners were digging gold. They were doing it for the king who was exploiting them. In this process they had turned

just numericals. Just for lure of gold, humanity was undergoing great torture. The aesthetic sense was getting cramped.

In his *Kingdom of Cards*, Tagore satirically wrote that great many explorers of truth carried to us the massage of life. But the old fashioned structure could not be changed because the members of society were afraid of any change. They wanted to stick to the conservative ways of life. It was a satire against narrow casteism, old slavish mentality of the people who, like people in *Red Oleander* were no better than mere cards with their values written on their face.

Was Tagore a poet of the people? The poet himself raised the question when he mused,

Baffled in the world's field of action,  
I dare not look the world in the face:  
Sunk in mine own seclusion sweet,  
I see not the cosmic life so vast.

In an introspective mood Tagore felt that he had not done justice to the toiling masses in his poems. He used to ask himself: "Was he really a poet of the people?"

In January 1941, just a few months before his death, this very question was gnawing the poet's mind. In his famous poem *Oikatan* ('Orchestra') Tagore lamented,

Nature's bountiful store  
Oft times did I explore  
And gathered many a soulful gift.  
But the human mind,  
Elusive as the wind,  
Wears a mask not easy to uplift.

*Oikatan* was a confession of his failure to have come closer to his people. He expressed the view that only a poet who



shared the joys and sorrows of people, who identified himself with their life, could truly speak on their behalf:

Linking heart to heart  
Is a delicate art,  
Which makes this mask to cease  
My art, I confess.  
Could not gain access  
To every heart with graceful ease.

Tagore lamented that he could not reach the ploughman, the weaver and the fisherman. In a plaintive note he recorded:

The ploughman and his team  
The weaver at the beam,  
Or the fisherman plying his net,  
Each has a life  
With a dream and a strife  
To which no entry could I get.  
And yet they form  
The bulk and the norm  
And lend to the earth a varied tone.  
They spin, they toil.  
They till the soil  
And build paradise of an arid zone.

His failure to achieve identity with his people could perhaps be attributed to the inner vanity which urged him to claim a "Knowledge of their varied lives." He came to feel that his kinship's tie was an illusion. He discovered 'a look of strangeness' in the eyes of his people!

In *Oikatan* he put forward the view that he alone can be a poet of the people who will be "their kin, thro' thick and thin", a friend "in need to stand by their side." For only such a poet would ever stand by them "in weal and woe, among friend and foe."

Tagore perhaps did not wrong the people so much as he wronged himself in *Oikatan* by such questionings. It was quite

possible that his "hungry mind" was not "appeased" but pined for more contact with his kin. But certainly his "vibrant flute" did not draw any mute music. The music of the flute expressed the hopes and despair of his people.

Through his innumerable poems, folk songs, essays, speeches and plays, Tagore expressed the sentiments of his countrymen at large. Tagore gave the first glimpse of his deep and abounding love for humanity in *Kadi O Komal* where he expressed his desire 'not to leave the beautiful world.' The same thought, found expression in different words in *Mukti*, in *Naibedya* where, rather than attain spiritual salvation, he preferred to live among ordinary men and women. His two sonnets, *Pran* in *Kadi O Komal* and *Mukti* in *Naibedya* were truly inspiring. His *Pran* could be compared with George Meredith's oft-quoted lines.

"For love we Earth, then serve we all;  
Her mystic secret then is ours."

*Sonar Tari* (The Golden Boat) published in 1894, contained some poems—*Daridra* (The Poor, a poem addressed to Mother Earth), *Mukti* (Salvation), *Gati* (Movement), *Viswa-Nritya* (The Dance of the Universe) wherein he attained the consummation that he devoutly wished for, a complete identification of his self with humanity at large:

My heart doth weep  
To mingle with the heart of Humanity's deep.

In 1896 was published *Chitra*, *Ebar Phirao Morey* was not only a poem of uncanny musicality but also a clarion call to the poet himself to be one with the struggling humanity which was steeped in poverty and ignorance. In a poem published during the Swadeshi movement, Tagore said:

The cry of our land is the cry for bread, for life for  
Light and freedom, for strength and health and  
Joyousness and open-hearted courage.  
Amidst this gloom, of our misery and distress,

Bring Unto us, O heavenly Muse, for once, the torch of faith  
And confidence.

*Katha O Kahini* published in book form in 1900 consisted of a number of poems which attested to the poet's sympathy for the oppressed and the exploited. A number of poems highlighted the evils of caste system; the poet wanted to impress that a man should be judged not by the caste in which his lot was cast but by his personal achievement. The most touching scene was perhaps depicted in the poem *Nagarluxmi* where we meet a beggar maid who comes forward to fight famine. In this poem Tagore has made it clear that to help mankind what was needed was mind and not money. During a famine the rich people abandon the fight against odds; only a beggar with the help and co-operation of all those around her could succeed in her mission.

In *Gitanjali* too, Tagore described at length the tragic lot of the down-trodden members of society who have been long exploited by their fellowmen. In many a poem he raised a note of warning against such injustices. The poem that attracted attention most was perhaps *Durbhaga Desh*. *Durbhaga Desh* in original *Gitanjali* was one of the oft-quoted poems of Tagore recording a warning to all oppressors. In this poem Tagore warned Indians not to look down upon any one as inferior. The poem made a frontal attack on the caste system prevalent in the country. It described how a section of the people has been deprived of its just rights in society, how they have been degraded and humiliated by their fellow brethren. Tagore warned,

Those whom you have deprived of their human rights,  
Those whom you made stand before you,  
Yet accorded no seat yonder  
Will drag you down,  
And will force you to stoop so low!

In *Durbhaga Desh* the poet served ultimatum on his people. It was a final warning where Tagore pleaded for social equality; else "the curse of the oppressed and the down-trodden are sure

to befall on the oppressors." This could be compared with Emerson's essay on *Compassion* where the author warned "You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong. The exclusionist does not see that he shuts out the door of heaven on himself in striving to shut out others."

In *Gitimalya* (1914) and *Gitali* (1914) there were references to the suffering of those ostracized.

In more than one poem Tagore expressed his deep sympathy for the "insulted humanity."

Me hast thou call'd  
Where humanity's teased with insults,  
Where sinks the light in the soul cowed with fright,  
Thine trumpet hath sounded time and again,  
Summoning me to action,  
Where cries the prisoner  
In dungeon dark.

## LOVE AND FAITH

There are references to the plight of the struggling humanity in *Patraput* (1938), *Senjuti* (1938) and *Prantik* (1938). In *Ahwan* (1938) the poet calls upon the people of the young nations of the world to wage a fight for freedom. He calls on them "to 'raise the banner of invincible faith.'

Do not submit yourself to carry the burden of insult upon  
your head,  
Kicked by terror,  
And dig not a trench with falsehood and cunning  
To build a shelter for your dishonoured manhood;  
Offer not the weak as sacrifice to the strong  
To save yourself.

Tagore gave expression to similar sentiments in a large number of journals—*Balaka*, *Sadhana*, *Bharati*, *Banga Darshan*, *Sabuj Patra*, *Bichitra* and *Prabashi*.

In his *Atma Shakti*, the poet denounced the problem of

casteism. He laid stress on constructive work rather than on purely political activity.

In his *Swadeshi Samaj* he emphasized the need of village reconstruction. He pleaded for *panchayati raj* long before the political emancipation of our country.

Tagore was certainly a people's poet. He made his signal and significant contribution to the political awakening in India. The seed of freedom was sown by him and others long back. The sapling has sprouted. Future generation will see the mighty oak.

The poet's dream will be fulfilled only when ignorance and poverty have been removed from our midst. 'His dream will be realised only when the masses will realise the dignity that is their due'.

"Let their voice resound  
From the depth of the ground  
And mingle with the symphony of glorious hue."



Both in thought and action Rabindranath Tagore treated himself as a 'citizen of the world'. Two or three centuries ago Oliver Goldsmith proclaimed himself 'a citizen of the world.' Tagore not only proclaimed; he translated his thought into action.

In his *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath wrote, "I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard."

In his search for truth and worship of beauty he came in touch with "good friends in all houses all over the world."

To Rabindranath, internationalism was much more and much above nationalism. "Politics in every country has lowered the standard of morality, has given rise to a perpetual contest of lies and deceptions, cruelties, hypocrisies and increased inordinately national habits of vain glory," he pertinently observed.

In his heart of hearts, he was a humanist first and a poet next. Tagore's love for humanity owed its origin to the Upanishadic thoughts. The Upanishads preached, "The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world conscious is *Brahman*." Tagore noted, "to attain our world-consciousness, we have to tune our feeling. In fact, the only true human progress would be coincident with this widening of the range of feeling. Tagore was convinced that "all our poetry, philosophy, science, art and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres."

Tagore assigned a very high place to the cultivation of this consciousness in human beings. To him this was the most impelling factor in the progress of a nation and finally the universe. 'Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness.' He expressed similar thoughts in one of his speeches in America. The pioneer among citizens of the world observed like a true prophet, "Let us live. Let us have the true joy of life, which is the joy of the poet in pouring himself out in his poem. Let us express our infinity in everything round us, in works we do, in things we use, in men with whom we deal, in the enjoyment of the world with which we are surrounded. Let our soul permeate our surroundings and create itself in all things, and show its fulness by fulfilling needs of all times."

## THE WORLD UNIVERSITY

To translate his ideas into practice, Tagore thought the best method would be to start a world university—a centre of learning where, through emotional integration and search of truth, one could train himself as a citizen of the world. On December 23, 1921, Tagore started the World University of India, popularly known as *Visva Bharati*. Tagore emphasised that the aim of the newly born university, perhaps the first of its kind in the world, would be "To study the mind of man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view."

He was convinced that it was only through cultural integration that men from different lands leading different lives can unite. To him life was an eternal search for truth. It should be a symbol of beauty. And it was not possible to search truth without love. Narrow parochialism, even narrow nationalism, spirit of hatred must be banished from the universe. "Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time like dew on the tip of a leaf," observed Rabindranath. To study the mind of man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view it is necessary to bring together the various scattered

cultures of the East. Tagore was convinced that the fittest place for such endeavour would be India, the heart of Asia into which flowed the Vedic, Buddhist, Semitic, Zoroastrian, and other cultures originating in different parts of the orient, from Judae to Japan. The aim of the Visva Bharati University has been to bring to realization the fundamental unity of the tendencies of different civilizations of Asia, thereby enabling the east to gain a full consciousness of its own spiritual purpose, the objugation of which has been the chief obstacle in the way of a true co-operation of East and West, the great achievements of these being mutually complementary and alike, necessary for universal culture, in its completeness."

Tagore, in his words and through works tried to assert that the only object of education was to lead man to freedom—'freedom from ignorance about the law of universe, freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world.'

Tagore undertook extensive tours round the world. His contact with the Western world dated back during the seventies of the last century. He went to London as a student in 1878 when he was in his teens and stayed there for about two years. Again he went to London University just after ten years, although he did not stay there for a long time. In 1912 Tagore went to the United States. During 1916 he visited Japan, Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hongkong. After four years, he again visited England, U.S.A., France, Holland and Belgium. In 1924 he went to China. During the next eight years Tagore made trips to South America, Europe, the Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq, Ceylon.

During these visits, Tagore came in direct contact with the people of these lands. Everywhere he was accorded hearty welcome by the people. This direct contact with people from so many lands reaffirmed his faith in universal brotherhood of man. The more he travelled, the more he longed to spread his message of love and friendship. In his own words,

"This expansive world, how little I know of it;  
All these countries and numberless cities, capitals;



In Japan in many of his speeches he uttered a note of warning against Japan's imitation of the West. Like Swami Vivekananda, Tagore had great confidence in the future prospect of Japan, emerging as a great centre of cultural activities in Asiatic countries. Tagore said, "I have ever wished that Japan, on behalf of all Eastern peoples will reveal an aspect of civilization which is generally ignored in other parts of the world. It should be greatly rich in the wealth of human relationship even in politics."

Tagore visited Japan for a second time after thirteen years. While in Japan, Rabindranath wrote the poem "A weary pilgrim" for the Japanese journal *Asahi Shimbun*.

In a number of addresses in Japan—where he stayed for more than a month during 1929—he discounted the importance of 'dead materials' an idea that he preached to the western civilization in particular.

From Japan, Rabindranath went to the United States. There he delivered a series of lectures on "Art", "The World of Personality", "The Second Birth", "My School", "Meditation", "Woman", etc. They were later published in his book: "Personality."

In most of his speeches he impressed upon the people of the States to set their soils beyond material ends. "Here in the United States, you have a great material empire but my idea of a nation is that it should have ideals beyond material ends. You have a worship of organisation. Capital organizes, labour organizes, religion organizes—all of our institutions organise. It all makes for endless strife. If there would be more of the fundamental idea of brotherhood and less of organization, I think accidental civilization would be immeasurably the gainer," Tagore emphasized.

In the States, he concentrated on collecting fund for his World University. He had a contract with the proprietor of "Pond Lyceum." He was to receive five hundred dollars for each speech. Besides the financial aspect there was also the idea of popularising his institution at Santiniketan. "I find these trips increasingly tiring. Still I go through with them as I feel that I am ordained to bring new messages of hope and godliness of these people. Also, I would like to make the institution at Santiniketan the connecting link between other



countries and India. There, we must establish the centre for the study of Humanity on an international plane. The era for narrow-minded chauvinism is reaching its end, the future movement for the confluence of intellectual participation on an international plane must originate in the open fields in Bolepur."

Tagore revisited America in 1920. He started his series of speeches with a talk on "the unity of the East and the West," at the Academy of Music. In New York he spoke on "League of Political Education" which was followed by his speech on "The Poet's Religion." According to a contemporary daily from New York, "Never has the Forum had as large an audience as that which turned out to hear the famous writer from the East, hundreds were turned away."

Tagore came to Sweden in May 1921. It was the Swedish Academy that awarded him the Nobel Prize in 1913 and proclaimed, "It is the first recognition of the indigenous literature of this Empire as a world force; it is the first time that an Asiatic has attained distinction at the hands of the Swedish Academies and this is the first time when the £ 8,000 prize has been awarded to a poet who writes in a language so entirely foreign to the awarding country as to Sweden."

In 1914, the World War I broke out and Tagore could not come to receive the Nobel Prize personally. He owed the people of Sweden a word of gratitude. A special sitting of the Academy was held. The Chairman observed, "The Nobel Prize for literature is intended for the writer who combines in himself the artist and the prophet. None has fulfilled these conditions better than Rabindranath Tagore." Tagore was invited at Upsala where he was taken in a huge procession. While in Sweden, Tagore saw a Swedish version of his 'Post Office' staged at the famous theatre hall 'Volksbingen'.

From Sweden, Tagore went to Germany, a country for which he had the greatest admiration, respect and affection. He expressed his reverence for Germany in many of his addresses and letters. "Germany has done more than any other country in the world for opening up and broadening the channel of the intellectual and spiritual communication of the West with India."

On June 2, 1921, Tagore delivered a speech at the Berlin University. The enthusiasm of the people to listen to him can be judged from an account given by a contemporary journal.

"Scenes of frenzied hero-worship marked a public lecture given by Rabindranath Tagore. In the rush for seats, many girls fainted. In the last moment, the police came and restored order."

Tagore had to deliver another speech next day as a special case. Thousands of persons who could not get seats the previous day thronged the hall. In Munich, Tagore collected more than ten thousand rupees as the receipt of gate money from people who came to hear him. The money was handed over by him personally for the welfare of German children.

Tagore revisited Germany in 1930.

Tagore went to China in April, 1924. Sun Yat-sen sent a special messenger to receive the poet. The Vice-Chancellor of Amoy University Dr. Lim Bong Keng paid his respects to the poet and invited him to address his students. Addressing a gathering at Shanghai, the poet asked them not to acquire the mentality of the west—eternally striving after power. Tagore emphatically maintained "the world was waiting for that moral idealism, for that spiritual standard of life to save it from that demon, the worship of Power."

In May 1924, Tagore celebrated his birthday in Peking. The Chinese *elite* conferred on him the title *Chu-Chen-tan*. Tagore was so much overwhelmed with that reception that he could not forget the scene till his death. In fact, he composed a poem on that incident just a few months before his death:

"Once I went to China;  
unknown those friends  
Put a mark of friendship on my forehead  
And said, 'you are known to us.'  
I had a Chinese name,  
A Chinese dress  
In my heart of hearts I felt,  
Wherever I get friends  
I get a new life too."

In August 1920 Rabindranath came to France. He stayed with the great philanthropist M. Kahn. He was much distressed at the sight of the war devastated Rheims. He was also pained to see the horrible sights. In a letter he observed, "It was a most saddening sight. Some of the terrible damages deliberately done, not for any necessities of war but to cripple France for ever, were so savage that their memory can never be effaced." It was here that he came in touch with Professor Sylvain Levi.

In September 1920 Rabindranath Tagore went to Holland. The great litterateur Frederik Willhem Van Eaden came to receive the poet. For more than two weeks Rabindranath toured all the important cities of Holland lecturing on the spiritual uplift of humanity. In one of the cities, Rabindranath was presented with a purse given to the organisers of the meeting to be handed over to the poet. There was a diamond ring and gold locket with a photograph of a young man. It was a gift from an unknown Hungarian refugee in Holland ! Tagore was delighted to know that people were familiar with his writings translated into Dutch and English.

From Holland Rabindranath extended his lecture tour to Belgium.

While in Italy, on June 10, 1926, the poet was accorded an address of welcome. He was overwhelmed with joy at the annual choral concert. More than one thousand voices mingled in one. This melody left a permanent imprint in his mind. The Rector of the Rome University, Professor Del Vechis described Tagore as "an intimate friend of humanity" and as such no stranger to Rome, the ancient cradle of civilization. The professor observed "you are no stranger to Rome, for Rome is the seat of the Universal Spirit, and she considers nothing which is human, strange to her."

Tagore's poems, his addresses and songs had influenced the *elite* of Rome. His humanistic poetry which was indeed humanistic philosophy had found a profound echo in their hearts. In the words of Professor Vechis, Tagore has "affirmed in mystic and sublime words the central truth, that above the material life, above the desire of wealth, of pleasure, and of

power, there exists the kingdom of spirit, of goodness, of love."

Rabindranath had an invitation to go to the Soviet Union in 1926 but it was not before September 1930 that he could reach Moscow. There he was impressed by their tremendous progress, particularly the equality of opportunities accorded to all persons in their new march. "What impressed me most here was the elimination of different classes—the rich and the poor." Tagore thought that this elimination of class consciousness has helped tremendously in developing the individuality of the Soviet man.

In the Soviet Union, Rabindranath came in close touch with the people and their institutions. His appreciation of the new progress in the Soviet land has been recorded in his famous "Letters from Russia."

While in the Soviet Union, Tagore took keen interest in the new theatre techniques of the land. He saw Tolstoy's 'Resurrection' staged at the Moscow Art Theatre. There he visited the 'First Opera House' and enjoyed a ballet 'Biaderka' based on an Indian love story.

Tagore was in Moscow for just a fortnight, September 11 to September 25, 1930. Life in Soviet Union left a lasting impression in his mind. From Moscow he left for Berlin.

In 1929, the poet went to Canada at the invitation of the National Council of Education. Educationists from different parts of the world met together to discuss on "Education and leisure."

Tagore was immensely happy to have attended the conference mainly because the aims and objects of the conference coincided with his thoughts on education. In this conference it was stressed that "Education in any country must necessarily fail to achieve its full purpose unless it maintains the closest contact with the world at large. Isolation educationally will inevitably lead to intellectual stagnation and to dearth of ideal." Tagore heard an echo of his voice when it was uttered in the Conference, "Each nation has its contribution to make and each has much to learn from others. For this reason the co-operation of other countries is being sought."

In this Conference, Tagore was the main speaker. He uttered a strong note of warning against western materialism. In the warning he had put the full power of a personality which had 'caught the imagination of all nations.'

Tagore in his long eventful journey of life never considered himself more than a mere wayfarer. He insisted on not being separated from them. Tagore said,

"O Universe, greatest of vessels,  
Whither are you bound ?  
Pick me up, carry me in your shelter  
I cannot swim all the way unguided.  
Millions of wayfarers are crossing that way,  
I do not wish to be separated from them."

(Translated by India Dutt)

In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan "Tagore will continue to enchant us by his music and poetry; for though he is an Indian, the value of his work lies not in any tribal or national characteristics but in those elements of Universality which appeal to the whole world. He has added to the sweetness of life, to the stature of civilization."

Tagore's dream to unify his country and his thoughts with that of other countries has certainly come true. Like a prophet he could foresee the leading role India was to play in the intellectual and spiritual uplift of humanity. There cannot be a greater tribute to the Sage of the era than to carrying on spreading the message of peace and universal brotherhood of mankind. Tagore was happy to have come in direct contact with the people at different corners of the world. "The whole world with its ideas has come close to me. There is no way left to me to preserve myself as a nationalist. Today, I am on the point of unifying my country and its thoughts with that of other countries in the world."

The journeys abroad played a vital role in fulfilling Tagore's dream of founding an ideal World University. They certainly inspired him, gave him much needed confidence to



carry on his work of the Visva Bharati University. In a letter to Andrews, Tagore wrote: "Altogether Europe has come closer to us by this visit of ours. Now I know more closely than ever before that Santiniketan belongs to all the world and we shall have to be worthy of this great fact."

## 27 | TAGORE'S INFLUENCE ON INDIRA GANDHI

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was profoundly influenced by Tagore. In fact she has recorded that Rabindranath Tagore was the first person whom she consciously regarded as a great man. She says, "being painfully shy with strangers I was completely overawed by his magnificent presence." She at first avoided the poet due to natural shyness. It was Tagore who called her.

The whole story is of historic importance. Mrs. Gandhi came to Santiniketan in July 1934. In January both Jawaharlal and Kamala Nehru had visited Santiniketan. Their intention was to see the *Ashram* for themselves before sending their daughter there. It was the first visit for Kamala. Nehru had come even earlier. Indira could not accompany them. She was getting ready for her Matriculation Examination of Bombay University.

Rabindranath warmly received the distinguished guests. He fixed the room next to his residence. Both enjoyed the stay. Jawaharlal noted the event as "a delightful day in life's journey."

It was good that Jawaharlal made all the arrangements in advance. For just after Indira's examination result was out her father was arrested and taken to Alipur Central Jail.

In sending Indira to Visva Bharati Nehru changed his earlier decision of sending her to Europe, probably Switzerland, for higher education. He left the subjects to be chosen to Indira herself—"decision must not be imposed on the modern

girl." He was impressed by the practical training imparted at Santiniketan. Nehru wrote: "I dislike the education which prepares a girl to play a part in the drawing room and nowhere else. Personally, if I had the chance, I would like to have my daughter work in a factory for a year, just as any other worker, as part of her education."

(*Letter from Alipore Central jail on April 27, 1934*).

Indira got enrolled as a student of the poet's World University in July. At her first touch of the *Abode of Peace*—that is what Santiniketan means—she fell in love with Nature. There was a thrill at being there. She had already read Tagore's world famous Nobel Prize winning book of verses *Gitanjali*. She was fascinated by the new environment. Tagore became her new guide. It was a significant event in her future career.

Santiniketan had a serene quiet touch. There was music in life. For a few days Tagore observed her from a distance. One day he saw Indira talking and laughing with some other girls. When they saw him watching them, they fell silent. Tagore immediately asked: "Why do you stop laughing? Are you afraid of me? Why do not you come near me? Do you think you would be bored by an old man?"

That was the beginning of a long intimate meaningful association. At Santiniketan Indira had a rare opportunity to read books. It was here that she completed reading a large number of books on socialism. Anil Kumar Chanda told me and others in our house a number of times, among other things, the curiosity and deep love for learning of *Priyadarshini*. Anil Chanda was in charge of *Siksha Bhavan*. He was also a close confidential associate of the poet. He later recorded these incidents. She was nicknamed *Red Lady* of Santiniketan by no less a person than the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson. There were such strict security arrangements, for the Governor's visit to Santiniketan that with the poet's prior permission all the students boycotted the visit. The Governor saw some of the rooms in the girls' hostel. Anderson had sharp eyes. He discovered a number of books on socialism neatly arranged on a shelf. He asked Anil Chanda with a smile who the "Red Lady" was. He was told that this

was Jawaharlal's daughter. The late Chanda recorded : "Santiniketan had very little to show by way of buildings in those days and the girls' hostel—*Sree Bhavan*—was therefore one of the places to be visited by the Governor. He passed through some of the dormitories and rooms and chanced to notice a neatly arranged table by a bedside near the entrance of one of the rooms. Out of sheer curiosity he picked up a book from the carefully arranged rack, and it was a copy of Shaw's *An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*. He picked up a few more and they seemed to be all on socialism or allied subjects. He asked as to who this Red Lady was and on being told that the seat belonged to Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, he chuckled and said, "Ah that explains it."

To quote Chanda again: "She lived like all other girls in the girls' hostel then called *Sree Bhavan*, sharing her room with three or four other girls. It was Panditji's express wish that no facilities out of the ordinary were to be offered to her. Indira was indeed a very disciplined young lady and would have surely disliked any fuss over her. She entered the daily life of the *Ashram* with perfect earnestness and diligence and could justifiably be described as a model student."

Kamala Nehru had to be taken to Switzerland for her treatment. And Indira had to accompany her mother. She left Santiniketan in April 1935.

Indira's stay at Santiniketan was short but the memory lingered. She never missed the chance of visiting the place. She never missed the chance of quoting Tagore at international and national conferences. She drew her greatest inspiration from Tagore's writings—both immortal poems and prose pieces on social justice, protest against exploitation and on peace, harmony and universal brotherhood of man. Indira looked to Tagore as a sage preceptor, a real *Guru*. She took over as Indira's third Prime Minister in January 1966. In July that year she observed: "Tagore is a part of our culture, a part of our rich heritage; not only of our own heritage but of the heritage of the world. He is one of those Indians who established links with the rest of the world. He stood for the widening of the human vision and the cross-fertilisation of cultures

and ideas. All his pleas and attempts were to lifting the human being to a higher level."

Her favourite song was Tagore's *ekla chale ray*. There was a great similarity in the silent, thinking and melody of musing of the two great minds. Both were very lonely in spite of being surrounded by huge crowds. Both were keenly sensitive. Both believed in the deep significant motto: "If they answer not to thy call walk alone."



Although Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1940) lived contemporaneously for about three decades, there is no record showing any meeting between the two stalwarts. There were many common thoughts and common meeting grounds in their immortal thoughts and literary works. Tagore was known to the American readers before he received the Nobel Prize for his master piece *Gitanjali* in 1913. Tagore went to America along with his son Rathindranath and daughter-in-law Pratima Devi. On October 28, 1912 he reached New York. He delivered a series of lectures before the *Unity Club*. He got invitations to deliver a series of lectures. Tagore was in America for six months. He had to deliver series of lectures at New York, Illinois, Rochester, New Hampshire, Harvard and many universities. His first introduction to American readers was through six poems from *Gitanjali*, just published in book form by India Society in London. They were published in *Poetry*, a journal from Chicago. The *Chicago Tribune* editorially welcomed the Poet's creation. Details are given about Tagore's popularity much before his receiving the Nobel Prize in Harriet Munroe's *Tagore in Chicago: The Golden Book of Tagore*.

### THE TWO NEVER MET

The most authentic biographer of Tagore, Prabhat Kumar

Mukhopadhyay, a life long companion of the poet tells us that Tagore was most fond of Walt Whitman. Among his three favourites of the American poets—Thorough, Emerson and Whitman—the latter used to be on his lips quite often. Mukhopadhyay tells us “very frequently the Poet used to read out before us the poems by Whitman.”

(*Mukhopadhyay—Rabindra Jivani, Vol. IV, p. 92*)

Tagore was equally fond of the disciple of Whitman—Edward Carpenter. He would also read out loudly his poems. Although there are innumerable pieces of Tagore which echo the same thought of unversality of humankind, it is indeed strange that the poet had written very little about Whitman.

Three years before the poet's death, the students and teachers of City College Calcutta approached Tagore to write a special article on Whitman to be read out in a special memorial meeting. Tagore was busy in writing *Vishwaparichay*—An Introduction to the Universe. In July 1937 he sent this article to the eminent scholar Vijaylal Chattopadhyay who was one of the organisers of the meeting. It was indeed a great tribute. The poet wrote, “Revolt against all conventions was in fact the self-proclaimed mission. In his versification he discards rhymes almost entirely and metre as generally understood.” The whole version is recorded in Bengali by Mukhopadhyay's biography.

## TAGORE ON WHITMAN

Tagore congratulated the organisers too for organising the session on Whitman. It was precise but full of praise for the poet of his heart. Here he describes the poet's mind as “a great mine”, where you find a grand mixture of many things precious—such an all-devouring mixture needs tremendous courage and great strength of mind. He compares the great mind to the original universe which was a huge lump of fire which melts things of varied qualities and mixes them up. That fire in the heart of Whitman that embraces the whole creation where you find no selection but only organisation. Here the rhymes are topsiturvied. It gets a beautiful identity

and immediately it gets melted down. Everything there is sublime. In one jump it has crossed all literacy hurdles. That is why it is indeed unparalleled. Revolt against all conventions is the characteristic of the great American poet. The details are available in Ramananda Chatterjee's *Prabasi*, *Bhadra* issue, 1344 Bengali year, p. 749.

Tagore first quotes Whitman in his famous piece the *World of Personality*. More than any Western-poet, Rabindranath Tagore was most influenced by the great American poet. Walt Whitman's influence is reflected in many of his masterpieces. "The hero of one of Tagore's later novels, Seshur Kabita (*Farewell My Friend*) (1929) quotes Whitman at a moment of rapture—*For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go. And we will risk the ship.*

In his style too the Poet published all his songs in *Akhanda Gitabitan*, himself classifying as many as fourteen hundred songs according to subjects. This too was similar to the style of publication by Walt Whitman's *An Acre of Green Grass*. Scholars discovered great similarities in the thoughts of Whitman and Tagore as early as the beginning of the century. It is observed "when Tagore's peculiar English verse-line first appeared in America, resemblances to Whitman were immediately printed out." For this one may refer to *The New York Times* reviews of November 3, 1913 and January 25, 1914.

## VOICES OF HUMAN HEART

A similar idea is expressed by Tagore when the burning desire to mingle into the infinity consumes his heart. In his famous *A Flight of Swans* Tagore writes:

"I hear the countless voices of the human heart  
Flying unseen,  
From the dim past to the dim unblossomed future,  
Hear, within my own breast,  
The fluttering of the homeless bird which,  
In company with countless others,  
Flies day and night,  
Through light and darkness,  
From shore to shore unknown,

The void of the Universe is resounding  
with music of wings;  
Not here, not here, somewhere far beyond."

## TAGORE, WHITMAN AND THE SUFI POETS

Great scholars of Tagore literature like Dr. Charuchandra Bandyopadhyaya, former Vice-Chancellor of Dacca and Calcutta Universities (author of *Rabi Rashmi* in two volumes) and Dr. Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya author of Tagore's most authentic day to day important events in four volumes, have compared many of Tagore's poems with Walt Whitman and the great *Sufi* saints. Prof. Ajit Chakravarty author scholar too joins them. They are convinced that both Tagore and Whitman, like the great *Sufi* saints, were convinced that the two basic things in creation are Nature and Man. They are eternally indivisible and the only truth that represents the quintessence of world philosophy. This brings them finally to the great thought of a global family environment. That leads us to the universality of humankind.

## LOVE FOR NATURE

The love for nature is not only a poetical concept. The ancient civilisation—whether in India, Greece or Egypt centred round the Nature. In India the entire Aryan culture was based on worship of nature. No wonder both Tagore and Whitman who were deeply drenched in *Upanishadic* thoughts fell in love with nature. Say the *Upanishadas*, Know Thyself, *atmanang biddhi*. In their search and exploration for eternal truth, both these mystic poets get lost and express their restlessness and thirst for the great Infinite. Tagore says, *aami chanchala hay aami sudurer piyashi*—I am restless, I am thirsty to discover the distant unknown. Whitman says, Allows ! we must not stop here Alone ! The road is before us !

(Walt Whitman, *The Song of the Open Road*)

Like Tagore's yearning for the distant unknown, Whitman too, says, "I believe that much unseen is also here."

This search for the unknown, the unseen, makes both the great poets really mystic. They cross the transcendental barriers of any national boundaries and reach a stage where the:

“mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
where knowledge is free ;  
where the world has not been broken up  
into fragments by narrow, domestic walls,  
where words come out from the depth of truth”.

(*Gitanjali*, p. 27)

In another typical poem Tagore expresses his restlessness. He says:

“O Poet ! this sea-rounded earth ringing with  
the playful, unceasing movements of invisible steps,  
has made your heart restless. In each beat of your pulse,  
I hear the footfall of the Restless.  
Nobody knows that in your blood  
Dance the waves of the ocean  
And murmur the sights of forests.  
Today I remember  
How I have noiselessly floated down the stream of Time  
Slipping from life to life,  
Changing from form to form,  
In the night, in the morning,  
All I received, I gave away  
In ever new gifts  
In ever new songs.”

(*A Flight of Swans, Poems from Balaka*,  
pp. 21-22)

The same spirit pervades throughout. In *Basundhara*, Tagore expresses deep identity with the Universe where the great Unseen spreads Himself on land, sea and the limitless sky. Same tune is heard in his poem *Samudrer Prati*. That Mother Earth has mingled with his body. It has touched the core of his heart. It has completely taken the better of him. He touches the dust of Mother Earth. Similarly, Tagore is excited when he



talks about the integration of so many world cultures on the soil of India. In *Gitanjali* (only included in the Bengali version), Tagore says :

On the shores of *Bharat*,  
Where men of all races have come together,  
Awake, o my Mind !  
Standing here with outstretched arms,  
I send my salutations to the God of Humanity,  
And in solemn chant sing His praises  
At whose call no one knows,  
Came floating streams of men  
and merged into the sea of *Bharat*.

### PASSAGE TO INDIA

No wonder, Tagore describes his own land and is in ecstasy. But what is equally amazing is the similarity in the description of the same topic by Whitman. In his *Passage to India*, Whitman says,

Passage to India !  
Lo, soul, seest thou not God's  
Purpose from the first ?  
The earth to be spanned, connected by network  
The races, neighbours, to marry and be given  
In marriage.  
The oceans to be crossed, the distant brought near,  
the lands to be welded together.

(*Passage to India*)

Tagore's *Basundhara* (The Universe) or *Prithvi* ((The Earth) or *Deshar Mati* (The Dust of My Land) will remind anybody of the lines from Whitman where he says,

The earth, that is sufficient  
I donot want the constellations any nearer,  
I know they are very well where they are,  
I know they suffice

for those who belong to them

(Walt Whitman—*Song of the Open Road*)

Both Tagore and Whitman believed in the Indian concept of *Vasudhoibo Kutumbakam*, inter-relationship with one and all of the world universality of man. That was mainly because basically both were equally influenced by the teachings of the *Vedanta*, that each particle—not only human being or creatures only—is the manifestation of the *Brahman*, the Universal Father.

### SEARCH FOR THE GREAT BEYOND

In the *Gardener*, the Poet writes, “O Great Beyond, O the keen call of Thy flute, I even forget, that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell alone.”

Tagore realises in his divine inspiration the estatic joy of life that is identified as, Nature and Man; That is reflected in the Poet's masterpiece *Nirjharer Swapna Bhanga* or the Awakening of the Waterfall written in 1883. How one only wished would have been the joy of Whitman had it been translated into English. It was nine years before Whitman's death that the great poem was composed. It was a soul stirring poem. According to the great philosopher scholar Dr. Brojendranath Seal, “the fountain awakened from its dream is one of the finest examples in the style of poetic delineation in which Nature and the Heart of Humanity are both exalted by being made to light up each other.”

In this immortal poem Tagore expresses that joy of mingling of Nature and Humanity :

“O Sweet, how Sweet is all that I see  
Sweet is the morning, sun, sweet the passing breeze.  
And sweet is the music of the glingling stream.”

This complete identity with Nature, which is the common current in the thinking of the two great minds—Tagore and Whitman—has been fully symbolised in the World University

of the Poet—Viswa Bharati at Santiniketan, where students are imparted teaching in the free background of Nature. More than hundred and twenty one years ago Whitman sang to the glory of man. He wrote:

“O life immense in passion, pulse and power cheerful, for  
freest action formed under the laws divine, the modern man  
I sing.”

That was the theme of innumerable poems of Tagore. Both got their inspiration from the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* where the immortal Sage Vyas sings to the glory of Man. A fourteenth century poet Chandidas recapitulates the same idea when he wrote:

*Shonoray Manush Bhai,  
Sobar uporay Manush Satya  
Tahar uporay nai.*

There is no greater Truth than Man

In the modern age, the great Saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa experimented a fresh breakthrough in religious thinking by declaring Man is God.

Both Tagore and Whitman were deeply influenced by the *Upanishadic* thoughts. To a great extent the simple ideas of the *Gita*, specially on the soul, were reflected in many of the poems of both Tagore and Whitman. The song written by Tagore on the occasion of the memorial service of his revered father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, included later on in *Gitanjali*, or the last three songs on death clearly confirm it. Similarly, Whitman too describes his realisation of the soul in the poems “was somebody asking to see the soul?” “Lo death! O for all that, I am yet of you unseen this hour with irrepressible love.”

Both were great patriots. One fifth of the 2200 songs of Tagore were, in one way or the other, in his own Motherland. He was ‘proud’ to have been born in India. He was “lucky” to have loved India. At least, fifty of his songs were given the marching tune. He is the only proud poet in the world whose two songs are popularly being sung with pride, prestige and

deep reverence as the National Anthems of two great Republics of India and Bangladesh—*Janagana* and *Sonar Bangla*.

Whitman's famous lines are:

"Here for you! and here for America  
Still the present I raise aloft  
Still the future of the States I harbinge  
Glad and sublime!"

In his famous *Oikatan* or *Orchestra*, Tagore sings to the glory of the peasants, the cobblers, the most neglected lot. Whitman wrote much earlier the poem on the butcher boy, the blacksmith. He wrote about the poor fellow steady and tall" who "stands poised on one leg on the string piece." Whitman says, "In the faces of men and women I see god and in my own face in the glass." This is quite similar to the thoughts reflected in Tagore's innumerable poems, stories, plays and long essays—this in brief, is also the quintessence of his *Religion of Man*.

Tagore fights for freedom for Man everywhere in the world. His patriotic poems stirred the two great sub-continent of India and Bangladesh. Calling those nations which were still under the shackles of alien rulers, Tagore wrote, "Come, Young nations, proclaim the fight for freedom, raise up the banner of invincible, build bridges with your life across the gaping earth blasted by hatred, and march forward."

Christianity was never spread in India by the alien British rulers. Much before the advent of adventurist group of East India Company in the eighteenth century a noble soul, a direct disciple of Lord Christ, St. Thomas preached the universality of Mankind in the first century A.D. That was the beginning of the Christianity in India. Today it is a part and parcel of the Indian culture. It is the third major religious group in the country. The Christians play an important role in the mainstream of political, administrative and the religious life of the country. No doubt Christianity too had left a deep imprint in the mind of Poet Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by the best of the Indian spiritual heritage. It is known that the greatest influence on the poet was of Upanishadic ideas which he inherited from his learned father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. It is reflected in almost all the major literary compositions that earned the poet world laurels. *Gitanjali*, *Gitimalya* and *Naibedya* were the reflections of the Upanishadic thoughts. Equally influenced was the poet by the great saints and sages of ancient and medieval India. Bhagwan Buddha, the Light of Asia, played an important role in shaping the tender mind of the poet. According to Prof. Asit Bandyopadhyay, an authority on Tagore literature, "Rabindranath based the *Religion of Man* on the bedrock of the Upanishads. But he has also copiously taken ideas from Zarathustra, Laotze, Christ, the Buddha, medieval saints of India



like Shri Chaitanyadeva, Kabir, Rajjab, Dadu, Surdas and lastly, the Baul singers or wandering mendicants of Bengal.”

So Christ occupied a very high place in the spiritual experiments of the World Poet right from the beginning of his literary career. One would be simply moved by observing the unique role of the Holy Christ in shaping many of the noble thoughts of the Poet. How was that? The Poet had a large number of internationally renowned intimate friends who happened to be Christians. Rev. Father C.F. Andrews, Rev. Father W.W. Pearson, William Rotheinstein, Leonard Elmhirst, Prof. Sylvein Levy, Professor Tucci, Dr Stella Kramrisch, Dr. M. Winternitz, Dr. V. Lesny, F. Benoit, Ernest Rhys, Stopford A. Brooke, Harriet Monroe, Romain Rolland were only to mention a few. The poet got intimate contacts with these great minds and learnt many things on the thoughts of the Holy Christ. In turn, they also benefited not only by receiving the best thoughts of the Orient but also the warm hearted affection from the poet.

Although it may seem a slight exaggeration bordering almost idolatory, yet it is a fact that Rev. Father C.F. Andrews, a devout true Christian who came to India for enlightening the people became the captive of the poet's deep love and unbounded affection. Prof. C.E. Andrews, popularly known as Charlie, has recorded that on his first visit to Santiniketan when he had the first glimpse of the poet, the very physical appearance of the Poet reminded him of the presence of the Holy Christ ! So much perhaps was also the similarity of the two appearances. The sensitive mind of Andrews was thrilled to discover the “living Christ”. Andrews never left India. He made India his home and died in India, spending his whole life in the cause of education and spiritual awakening of the students he came in touch with. Andrews expressed his real sentiments once when he wrote from Capetown. “Gurudev,—only think what I should have been without you! It is true, I might have been self-sacrificing and all that nature for that is almost now a second nature. But I should have grown narrower and narrower, in that very groove”. (*Letter from Capetown*, Feb 12, 1926.) Similar was the case with Rev. Father W.W. Pearson who devoted his whole life to the

cause of spreading education in India. Both dedicated themselves to the development of India—spiritually and even politically under the guidance of the Poet.

Leonard Elmhirst was the right hand of the Poet at rural reconstruction projects at Sriniketan, a sister organisation of the Visva Bharati University at Santiniketan. Leonard Elmhirst was a wealthy person. He spent his whole wealth for the cause of rural reconstruction and betterment of humankind in the rural areas of Bengal. Besides this, William Rotheinstein and W.W. Yeats were the first two who encouraged the poet and sent his poems for consideration for the Nobel Award. They were the first to listen to the original English manuscript, long before it was printed. In touch with all these great minds who were all dedicated true Christians, it is but natural that Christianity came much nearer to his heart. It got completely identified with his thought system. To add to this long list, one must mention the name of Madam Victoria Ocampo of Argentina who was a great spiritual lady and a great admirer of the poet. The poet gave her the Indian name of *Vijaya* which is the literal translation of the original name Victoria. Beautiful lines in her praise touch the point of certain romance between the two. Tagore lived with her in Argentina for quite some time. She too came to India and stayed with the Poet.

Poet Tagore used to write on the occasions of Christmas Day special poems which he used to present then freely to his Christian friends in the *Ashram*. A full-length book can be compiled only on the Poet's thoughts on the Holy Christ!

Tagore never accepted a religion just for its philosophical substance. He experimented with Truth in various ways. In 1930 Tagore was invited to deliver the famous *Hibbert Lectures* at Manchester College, Oxford on Religion of Man. Tagore observed there, "the Religion of Man has been growing within my mind as a religious experience and not merely as a philosophical subject." Here he brought forth his views on religion. Obviously the Poet was invited at Oxford by quite a large number of organisations to express his views on religion. It was almost two decades after he was awarded the coveted Nobel Prize. The maturity of mind, experiments with Truth and experiences with varied people from different nations and different faiths

had widened his vision. He was invited to address the Chapel of Manchester College, Oxford on Sunday May 25, 1930. There the Poet started the speech with the Upanishadic ideas of renunciation. "Thou must know that whatever moves in this moving world is enveloped by God. And therefore find thy enjoyment in renunciation, never coveting what belongs to others."

The mutual hatred, "the savage mentality" is product of barren spirit of negation that dwells in the spiritual right. Heralding the advent of Lord Christ the Poet said, "when the morning of mutual recognition broke out, the morning of co-operative life, that divine mystery which is the creative spirit of unity, imparted meaning to individuals in a larger truth named 'people'. These individuals gladly surrendered themselves to the realization of their true humanity, the humanity of a great wholeness composed of generations of men consciously and unconsciously building up a perfect future. They realised peace according to the degree of unity which they attained in their mutual relationship, and within that limit they found the one sublime truth which pervades time that moves, the things that change, the life that grows, the thoughts that flow onwards. They united with themselves the surrounding physical nature in her hills and rivers in the dance of rhythm in all her forms and colours in the blue of her sky, the tender green of her corn shoots".

*Religion of Man*, p. 233)

There is a great misunderstanding, specially among foreign readers, that the Poet was sometimes anti-Christian. Far from it, in fact these wrong ideas must have been derived from the Poet's adverse remarks against mass killings in world wars. He was against exploitation and colonial rule by some European countries. So when he criticised the different rulers, majority of whom happened to be Christians, he clearly asked being Christians how could you do so (killing people)? He never criticised Christ or Christianity. In his famous novel *Gora*, the Poet expresses the sentiments of Gora who as an orthodox Hindu decries the Christians. Finally it is revealed Gora himself is a Christian! An authority on Rabindranath Tagore, Prof.

Devipada Bhattacharya, Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University in an interesting analysis of this point observes, "Tagore castigates the 'dead habits' and extols 'thought and action', not emotional devotion. He does not uphold any concept of religion which is divorced from reasons and *karma*. So, for him, God cannot be obtained through silent meditation in a solitary corner in a temple, you can have him through *Karmayoga*, among the toiling masses in the temple of dust, or 'where live the poorest, the lowliest and the lost.'" Since 1907 he ceased to be identified as a member belonging to particular caste, community, religion or sect. Gora, the protagonist of the novel *Gora* (1910), earlier a leader of aggressive Hinduism, underwent a radical change when he came to know that actually he was an Irish orphan. Gora says to Pareshbabu, the liberal Brahmo gentleman:

"Today I really feel I am Indian. Now I have nothing in conflict with the Hindu, the Muslim or the Christian. Today I belong to all castes of India. Pareshbabu, give me the 'mantra' of that God whom everyone can claim, be he a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or a Brahmo and whose temple-doors are not closed before any person of any caste or creed. These are really the sayings of Rabindranath himself, a speaker of universal religion."

In *Gora*, Tagore combines a character that criticises, unknowingly his own religion. Certainly it was not Tagore's intention to criticise the Christians. The same Gora, when he comes to know about his birth, nationality and faith cools down. He tries to link up the whole scene neatly and talks of universality of religion. It is here that we get Tagore's real religion of Man.

## CHRISTMAS DAY AT SANTINIKETAN .

All Indians, irrespective of their religion join the great Christmas Festival throughout the country. It is a national festival like Dushera, Diwali or Id. No wonder Christmas Day is regularly observed religiously in Santiniketan Ashram. It is



a regular part of the cultural life of the *Pous Utsava* (Festival of the month of *Pous*, that is winter). Eighth of *Pous* used to be reunion day for the former students and teachers of the *Ashram*. Ninth of *Pous* was devoted to a memorial service for the departed ones. Tenth of *Pous* used to be the Christmas Day. In his short speeches on the auspicious occasions Tagore used to stress the importance of the substance of the message of the life and teachings of Lord Christ. These immortal messages, the Poet asserted "do not belong or are not restricted only to the Christians. They belong to the whole humankind."

(*Khristadharma* The Religion of Christ,  
*Sabujpatra, Pous, 1321, p. 591*)

If anybody cares to scan the works of Tagore one is amazed to note that not a 'Christmas passed without the poet's special offering to the Great Messenger of Peace. As he composed some of the best pieces on peace of Buddha, the Light of Asia, so the poet prayed to Lord Christ to bring peace to the World.

### SPECIAL PRAYERS

That Tagore was a great admirer of Lord Christ and was definitely deeply respectful to Christianity there is not the slightest doubt. He would regularly observe Christmas Day as any devout Christian would do. Tagore never missed a chance to offer special prayers to Christ even when he was on tours. Once he observed it in a bedroom in America all alone. One can get a glimpse of his deep reverence for Christ from a letter written to a disciple Hemlata Devi from America on December 24, 1912. The original letter was in Bengali. Translated into English it reads like this:

"Today is Christmas. Just now at dawn we finished our special prayer. Rathi (son, that is Rathindra Nath Tagore) and *Bouma* (daughter-in-law, that is Mrs. Pratima Tagore) have left for Chicago. Only Bankim, Somendra and I are staying here. We, the three, had observed the great festival in a corner of the bedroom. I did not feel anything missing. If the Master of Ceremony takes His seat then nobody takes cognisance of



lapses in arrangements or preparations. We made our obeisances to Him. We received respectfully His blessings. We prayed to Him wholeheartedly. *Yadbhadiang tannaasuba*. In the journey to the path of Truth, man is the biggest hurdle to man. Just like the great son of God who was born on this auspicious day lest that divinity grow in our lives, just the ever pure jasmine like serene child, just like the son of the helpless Father, just like the (hope to) the helpless, the needy. Let us all stand today in His court. On behalf of all humankind, the elder Brother of Mankind had prayed, "Thy Kingdom come." It was just like our ancient sages and seers who said *Aabirabirma edhi*."

(Mukherjee, Prabhat Kumar: *Rabindra Jibani*,  
Vol. IV, p. 287)

The prayer, we must say was most fruitful. For, very soon the Poet had the most memorable event in his life. Soon afterwards Tagore got the news of the Nobel Award on Literature. No wonder, as the German translator of the Poet Helene Meyer Franck tells us how the spiritual inspiration from *Gitanjali* transmitted from heart to heart. She records how German ladies got the psalms by heart and would at night repeat poems from *Gitanjali* while retiring in bed. "Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles". Does it not very much resound like a psalm from the Holy Bible?

Some of the finest poems were composed on Christmas Days. Judgment (*Bichar*) was one such piece. Here the poet pleads to the Holy Christ to pardon those who are indulging in breaking peace. This was dedicated to C.F. Andrews and later on included in *Letters to a Friend*, p. 52. It was a warning against a blood bath of wars. That was in 1913 just before the First World War. Tagore's faith in humankind was shattered. That was reflected in a letter to C.F. Andrews.

Prabhat Mukherjee gives a vivid description of the Poet's great enthusiasm year after year to observe the great Christmas Day as a part of the Festival of Winter *Pous Utsava*. In 1922 a large number of foreign (mainly European) scholars

participated in the celebration. Of course Tagore himself led the service in the Ashram Temple.

(Mukherjee Prabhat Kumar: *Rabindra Jibani*,  
Vol. III, p. 105)

Wherever he had gone for whatever important assignment the Poet would hurry back to join the *Pous Utsava* and the Christmas Day. On this occasion in 1932, the Poet observed, "In our lives His great day comes suddenly but His death by crucifixion comes days after days. Greed is virile today. The morsel is snatched from the mouth of the weak. Standing before the strong the crucified souls are repeating the oft repeated words. Where is the festival? He is being crucified in the annals of mankind every moment."

(*Prabasi*, *Magh*, 1339, pp. 465-66)

On December 25, 1937, Tagore composed two of his best pieces on World Peace. They were published later on in *Prantik* (No. 17 and No. 18). It is a strong protest to the lust for material power and exploitation of one country by another.

On the great Christmas Day people all over the world pray to the Heavenly Father for peace. The temples toll the bells of peace but where is that peace? asks the poet. The 'poisonous snakes' are breathing venom everywhere. Who will listen to the words of peace?

## A BEAUTIFUL WORLD—A DREAM

Tagore always dreamt of a beautiful peaceful better world. He did not want "to die leaving this beautiful world." That the sons of the Holy Christ were engaged in a monstrous spree for capturing materialistic power was, to Tagore, a great worshipper of Christ, an anti-thesis. He protested against this jealousy and rivalry among European nations who had all the one aim of using the backward peoples for their own selfish gain and interest. He wrote:

On the seashore of the West, the funeral pyres  
Are emitting the last flames caught from the torch of a  
Selfish decadent civilization.

The worship of energy in the battlefield of factories is not  
Worshipping Thee, The Protector of the Universe.

(Tagore: *The Blood-Red Line*)

Tagore had full sympathy for those misled people. His faith  
in humankind did not vanish. He in fact, felt proud of those  
who had nothing but God.

"Those who have everything but Thee my God, Laugh at  
those who have nothing but Thyself."

His faith in the divinity and the Supreme one was infinite.

The Poet's mind was much agitated by the catastrophic  
wars. He saw within his own life time at least two world wars.  
And as the sensitive tender one would always revolt, Tagore  
could not stand these ordeals simply without protests. Unfor-  
tunately, both the sides engaged in wars were Christians. To  
Tagore, the agony was terrible. On Christmas Day in 1939  
Tagore wrote famous poem on Christ entitled *Manabputra*. It  
was included in his book of verses *Punascha* and translated into  
English as the *The Son of Man*. It was included in the "Collect-  
ed Poems and Plays" published by Macmillan.

It is a short but a moving poem. Tagore says:

Those who struck Him once in the name  
of their rulers,

are born again in this age,  
They gather in their prayer-halls  
in a pious garb,

They call their soldiers,  
"Kill", "Kill", they shout;  
in their roaring mingle the music  
of their hymns,

While the son of Man in His agony prays,  
"O God, fling, fling, far away this cup filled with the  
bitterest of poisons."

(*Poems by Tagore*, p. 112).

The prayer to Holy Christ was conducted by C.F. Andrews in the Santiniketan *Ashram* Temple. This was the Poet's last lecture in the *Ashram*. The above special song on Holy Christ was also sung on the occasion. The song was also included in the *Gitanitan*. The poem was also published in Ramanada Chatterjee's *Prabasi*.

(*Prabasi*, *Magh*, 1346, p. 529)

No doubt Tagore criticises quite frequently the west for its exploitative adventures and colonial repressions, for devastating wars between one nation and another and for its materialistic aims. It is equally true at the same time he criticises his own system—his own orthodox system and sadly laments for its long stagnation. He criticises the stagnation in our Indian thinking. The Poet implores wider thinking avenues. Tagore says, "We Indians have had the sad experience in our own part of the world how timid orthodoxy, its irrational repressions and its accumulation of dead centuries, dwarfs man through its idolatry of the Past. Seated rigid in the centre of stagnation, if firmly ties the human spirit to the revolving wheels of habit till faintness overwhelms her. Like a sluggish stream choked by rotting weeds, it is divided into shallow slimy pools that shroud their dumbness in a narcotic mist of stupor. This mechanical spirit of tradition is essentially materialistic, it is blindly pious but not spiritual, obsessed by phantoms of unreason that haunt feeble minds in the ghastly disguise of religion. For our soul is shrunken when we allow foolish days to weave repeated patterns of unmeaning meshes round all departments of life. It becomes stunted when we have no object of profound interest, no prospect of heightened life, demanding clarity of mind and heroic attention to maintain and mature it. It is destroyed when we make fireworks of our animal passions for the enjoyment of their meteoric sensations, recklessly reducing to ashes all that could have been saved for permanent illumination. This happens not only to mediocre individuals hugging fetters that keep them irresponsible or hungering for lurid unrealities, but to generations of insipid races that have lost all emphasis of significance in themselves, having missed their future." (Tagore: *Religion of Man*).

## SANTINIKETAN UPADESHMALA

Besides his *Religion of Man*, *Santiniketan Upadeshmala* (Sermons at Santiniketan) in seventeen volumes give an idea about the spiritual outlook of the Poet. These are collections of the Poet's day-to-day sermons to the students and teachers of the *Ashram*. If one cares to scan or analyse this invaluable collection, one would simply wonder at the wider outlook and deeper moorings of the Poet's universality of religion. In these words of wisdom Tagore not only recapitulates the higher thoughts from the *Upanishads* but he preaches the teachings of Lord Christ and Bhagwan Buddha. In one such lecture on Christ dated *Chaitra 12, 1335*, Tagore says "As the Father is perfect, if the son does not attempt continuously to be so, the connection and relation between the father and the son cannot be properly linked." (*Purnata*, pp. 395-97)

On another occasion recalling the noble thoughts of the Holy Christ, Tagore says "I and my Father are one." He compares it to the *Upanishadic* thoughts where the sages proclaim, "I am that—*Shahang Tattamasi*." A man is a most negligible creature. But by the divine touch of the Supreme One he becomes all powerful.



The message of world peace and unity of man has been the quintessence of Indian philosophy. Right from the *Rig Vedas* to the modern days of Tagore, India has been pleading for world peace and unity of man. It was indeed interesting to note that in the historic Seventh Non-Aligned Summit held in New Delhi in March 1982 the U.N. Secretary-General Mr. Javier Perez De Cuellar, quoted extensively from the World poet Rabindranath Tagore. While making a forceful plea for upholding human rights and dignity, the Secretary-General in his address dwelt on the need to put an end to irrationality in world affairs and avoid the dangers of narrow nationalism and upholding of human dignity. The distinguished Civil Servant found the message of India reflected in the lines of Tagore as the most ideal description of freedom for mankind. In his famous poem *Gitanjali*, Tagore described the freedom he wished for his own country as well as, by and large, for the world. To quote from *Gitanjali*,

*"Where the mind is without fear  
and the head 's held high."*

The Poem first appeared in Tagore's equally famous book of verses *Naibedya*.

## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Indian culture is the symbol of world unity. Basically being a nation with unity in diversity it presented an ideal model for world unity not only through its philosophical treatises but also by its lofty heritage of culture. Tagore wrote,

"A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on, carrying its burden easily, but diversity is a many cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with all force. Be it said to the credit of India that the diversity was not her own creations, she had to accept it as a fact from her history."

(*A Tagore Reader* edited by Amiya Chakravarty, p. 201)

## SUBMISSION TO HIGHER PRINCIPLE

In the beginning, the unity effort may seem to be merely mechanical. In order to attain this unity of man one has to submit to higher values. Tagore wrote in his *A Vision of India's History*,

"When communities which differ from each other in race and culture come and settle in the same vicinity, the first attempts at unity become too obviously mechanical. Some system of adjustment is needed, but in order for it to be successful it must submit to a higher principle life itself."

Today, when the whole world has become a global village this is most applicable for the whole universe.

Tagore wanted peace and unity in the world. A sensitive poet that he was, terribly upset by international power conflict and dissension, his heart was bleeding at the very sound of the war drums.

"The war drums are sounded. Men force their features into frightfulness and gnash their teeth; and before they

rush out to gather raw human flesh for death's larder, they march to the temple of Buddha."

(*Patraput*, Second edition, 1938)

This lust for power and authority at the cost of human dignity was due to the lack of proper cultivation of human values.

Tagore was not only a poet with a vision and farsight. In many ways he was much more practical than many. He did not bequeath only beautiful poems and literary pieces on world unity and peace. He gave practical shape to his imagination. He translated them into practice.

### WORLD UNIVERSITY FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Tagore's greatest contribution to world civilisation has been the founding of Visva Bharati University. He described this centre of learning as the world's nest—*yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam* "where the world makes its home in a single nest." The message of unity and peace got a concrete shape in a new way. Rabindranath wrote:

"Visva Bharati represents India where she has her wealth of mind which is for all. Visva Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best." That was much before the birth of League of Nations or the United Nations! That too by a single man!

Tagore's whole life's ambition was to spread the message of unity of mankind and peace to the world. That was why he made it clear that the only aims and objects of the Visva Bharati University would be "To study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view." Tagore wanted to tie the world nearer. So he insisted that it should be the object of his new university "to bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.

## MODALITY OF WORLD PEACE

What would be the modality of world peace? How to approach the different countries with divergent political colours? How to start the dialogue at par?

Rabindranath wanted us "to approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia." All he wanted to bring world peace was through exchange of ideas. The poet knew pretty well that world peace just cannot fall from the sky and cannot be achieved without proper cultivation. So the new university, the first of its kind, Tagore envisioned that his university would "seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres."

## ALL THE WINDOWS OPENED

To understand each other well one must know the other's way of life, his thinking, his religion. So Tagore stressed the need for study of comparative religions. "With such ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into and study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other Civilisations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity in externals which is necessary for true spiritual realisation, in amity, good fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western Countries, from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste."

## CALL FOR HARMONY TO NEW NATIONS

Tagore felt keenly for the suppressed and tortured nations of the world. He felt "humiliated to see all the values, which

have given whatever worth modern civilisation has been betrayed one by one". Tagore lamented, "our country is itself a victim of these wrongs. My words have no power to stay the onslaught of the maniacs, nor even the power to arrest the desertion of those who erstwhile pretended to be the saviours of humanity."

*(In a letter to Professor Vincent Lesny)*

Inviting the new nations of the world Tagore wrote:

"Through the troubled history of man comes sweeping  
a blind fury of destruction and the towers of  
civilisation topple down the dust.

In the chaos of moral nihilism  
Are trampled underfoot by marauders  
The best treasures of Man heroically  
won by the martyrs for ages."

In this poem, addressed to the people of Canada, Tagore gave a clarion call to all younger nation's He exhorted:

"Come, young nations,  
Proclaim the fight for freedom,  
raise up the banner of invincible faith,  
build bridges with your life across the  
gaping earth blasted by hatred,  
and march forward."

*(Nabajatak)*

Tagore instilled tremendous self-confidence in the hearts of the young nations. Time and again he called them to get united and oppose insult and injustice heaped on them by the big nations.

"Do not submit yourself to carry the burden of insult  
upon your head,  
kicked by terror,  
and dig not a trench with falsehood and cunning



to build a shelter for your dishonoured manhood;  
offer not the weak a sacrifice to the strong  
To save yourself."

(*Ibid*)

## HARBINGER OF WORLD PEACE

Tagore was a harbinger of World Peace. He was terribly upset by world events of destruction. He once said,

"The detailed facts of history which are the battleground of the learned, are not my province. I am a singer myself and am even attracted by the strains that come forth from the House of Songs. When the strains of ideals that flew from the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul."

In spite of Europe going to two world wars causing misery to millions and which caused great agony to Tagore, the Poet had not rejected the people of Europe totally. He had a wider vision and could anticipate things to come. He wrote that the humble condition of the majority of the nations would one day be changed by great leaders who would take up the challenges.

"Noble minds who have ever stood up for the rights of man, irrespective of colour and creed, who have braved calumny and insult from their own people in fighting for humanity's cause and raising their voices against the mad orgies of militarism. These are there to prove that the fountainhead of the water of everlasting life was not run dry in Europe and from thence she will have her rebirth time after time."

(*Nationalism*, p. 66)

## PEACE THROUGH LOVE

Tagore wanted peace in a world "wild with the delirium of hatred", a world where "conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish, crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed." He found man's heart "anguished with the fever of unrest, with the poison of self-seeking, with a thirst that knows no end." He found countries far and wide flaunt on their foreheads the blood-red mark of hatred. He wanted to bring harmony into their life. That is possible only through love. Tagore noted "Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart."

"Peace is not there when we are arrogant. Mighty power deeply drenched in ego and arrogance cannot bring peace. Pride of knowledge, wealth or vanity cannot bring peace. Harmony, understanding and tolerance only can bring it. For attaining these, Tagore wanted, "We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility". He repeated, "Men are cruel, but Man is kind." "The false can never grow into truth by growing in power."

Tagore was convinced that the oppressed man will triumph one day. He said, "Man's history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man."

It is through harmony that unity and peace will reign. It is through understanding and adjustment that the earth will be pleasant and worth living. That is possible only through love. Addressing Mother Earth Tagore noted, "Let this be my last word, that I trust in thy love."

## ON AFRICA

Tagore felt for the oppressed people of the world equally as he did for his own countrymen. In 1937, Tagore wrote his famous poem *Africa*.

"You are hidden, alas, under a black veil,  
which obscures your human dignity to the  
darkened vision of contempt.  
With man-traps stole upon you those hunters

whose fierceness was keener than the  
fangs of your wolves,  
whose pride was blinder than your lightless  
forests.

The savage greed of the civilised stripped  
naked its unashamed inhumanity.

You wept and your cry was smothered,  
your forest trails became muddy with  
tears and blood,

While the nailed boots of the robbers  
left their indelible prints  
along the history of your indignity."

*Africa* has been an oft-quoted poem and was one of the best pieces in *Patraput*.

The poem described the poet's agony for the suppressed people of Africa.

Addressing the distressed land of Africa Tagore wrote,

"In that early dusk of a distracted age,  
when God in scorn of his own workmanship  
violently shook his head at his primitive efforts,  
an impatient wave snatched you away, Africa,  
from the bosom of the East,  
and kept you brooding in a dense enclosure  
of niggardly light,

guarded by giant trees.

There you slowly stored  
the baffling mysteries of the wilderness  
in the dark cellars of your profound privacy,  
the signals of land and water  
difficult to read;

and the secret magic of Nature invoked  
in your mind

magic rites from beyond the boundaries  
of consciousness."

(*Patraput*)

## SPIRITUAL UNITY: BUDDHA AND CHRIST

Unity and World Peace are possible, Tagore felt only through a subtle spiritual unity. Tagore was convinced that human love was the only link to world unity.

It would be easier to cultivate love for all through spirituality. No amount of political attainment or economic prosperity alone can attain this unique peace. Tagore unequivocally wrote,

"Two prophecies about the world's salvation are cherished in the hearts of the two great religions of the world. They represent the highest expectation of man, thereby indicating his faith in a truth which he instinctively considers as ultimate—the truth of love. These prophecies do not have a vision of fettering the world and reducing it to tameness by means of a close-linked power forged in the factory of a political steel trust. One of the religions has for its meditation the image of the Buddha who is to come, *Maitreya*, the Buddha of love; and he is to bring peace. The other religion waits for the coming of *Christ*. For Christ preached peace when he preached love, when he preached the oneness of the Father with the brothers who are many. And this was the truth of peace. Christ never held that peace was the best policy. For policy is not truth. The calculation of self-interest can never successfully fight the irrational force of passion—the passion which is perversion of love, and which can only be set right by the truth of love. So long as the powers build a league on the foundation of their desires for safety, secure enjoyment of gains, consolidation of past injustice, and putting off the reparation of wrongs, while their fingers still wriggle for greed and reek of blood, rifts will appear in their union; and in future their conflicts will



take greater force and magnitude. It is political and commercial egoism which is the evil harbinger of war. By different combinations it changes its shape and dimensions, but not its nature. This egoism is still held sacred, and made a religion; and such a religion, by a mere change of temple, and by new committees of priests, will never save mankind. We must know that, as through science and commerce, the realization of the unity of the material world gives us power, so the realization of the great spiritual unity of man alone can give us peace. . . ."

(From *Creative Unity, A Tagore Reader*  
edited by Amiya Chakravarty, p. 273)

## GREETINGS FOR THE NEW ERA

In his life time Tagore witnessed two World Wars. His dream of a peaceful beautiful earth which he did not want to part with (*moritay chahina aami sundar bhuvanay*) was almost shattered. But the poet did not lose faith in man. He felt man will triumph, peace will prevail over everything else. He recorded his faith in Man in *Crisis of Civilisation*. In his famous essay *Crisis in Civilization*, published and read by him on his eightieth birthday in 1941, Tagore declared his faith in Man. Wrote Tagore:

"As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of



conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage."

(*Crisis in Civilisation*)

## THE INDIAN HERITAGE

India has an answer, asserts Tagore.

Right from the days of *Rig Veda* India has been pleading for world unity and peace. India stands for friendship with all, *Vasudhoibo Kutumbakam*. The whole world *Vasudha*, is her relation. In the same breath Tagore says, "He who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings, he does not remain unrevealed should be our motto." Several decades ago Tagore said, "I deeply hope that our educational centres should be the meeting ground of the East and West. In the world of material gain human beings have neither stopped fighting, nor will they easily do so. But there are no obstacles to their meeting in the field of cultural exchange."

(*Towards Universal Man*, p. 250)

This is a unique approach to the problem of World Peace. Tagore was convinced that unity of mankind would be more easily attained through education rather than through anything else. Knowledge is power. It is more powerful than all the hydrogen and atom bombs put together. It is only through knowledge that one understands a thing better. It is only through knowledge that a mind leads itself to the highest stage of man. Once one reaches that stage his heart is full of love. Malice, lust, hatred, jealousy, all enemies of peace vanish. Only then can we usher in harmony to the world.

## MUTUAL RESPECT— THE KEYNOTE

Harmony is possible only through mutual respect, respect for each other's caste, colour, creed or faith with full respectful treatment, tolerance and understanding. Only then the orchestra

produces a beautiful symphony. Tagore, while talking of *Society and State*, wrote:

“The inmost creed of India is to find the one in the many, unity in diversity. India does not admit difference to be conflict, nor does she espy an enemy in every stranger. So she repels none, destroys none, and strives to find a place for all in a vast social order. She acknowledges every path and recognizes greatness wherever she finds it.

Since India has this genius for unification, we do not have to fear imaginary enemies. We may look forward to our own expansion as the final result of each new struggle. Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian shall not die fighting on Indian soil; here they will find harmony.”

(*Towards Universal Man*, pp. 61-66)

The most relevant of the poet's writings are given shape today by the world nations—big or small, poor or rich. Tagore's realisation on the theme of welfare is perhaps one of the best. Said the poet,

“Wealth is the burden of bigness,  
Welfare the fullness of being.”

(*Ibid*, p. 68)

Peace was the last word of the poet. In his last poem published posthumously after his demise, Tagore described peace but this peace was slightly different. It was eternal peace. Though published posthumously in *Sesh Lekha* this melodious song was originally composed on 3 December, 1939. “It was the poet's wish that it should be sung after his death”. It was accordingly sung at the memorial service held at *Santiniketan* Mandir on the evening of 7th of August 1941. Tagore said,

“In front lies the ocean of Peace  
Launch the boat, Helmsman.”





Born in Rawalpindi in 1930 Dr. Vivek Ranjan Bhattacharya was educated in Stephen's College, Delhi and was in the first group of Post Graduate Students of Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University. He got his Ph.D. from the Faculty of Management of Delhi University.

Dr. Bhattacharya has to his credit more than forty books in varied subjects. Awakened India—A Tryst with Destiny, Towards National Unity and Integration. Indira Gandhi—Her Role in World Peace, Relevance of Tagore, The Spirit of Indian Culture—Saints of India, Famous Indian Sages—Their Immortal Messages, President Zail Singh—A Profile of Dedication, Communication in a Global Village, An Introduction to the Theory of Business Management and Administration, New Face of Rural India, Challenge of Village India, Social Security Measures in India—With Special Reference to Production Motivation, Career Management—A New Challenge, are only a few to mention.

Dr. Bhattacharya addressed a number of national and international seminars on various topics. He believes firmly in all religious faiths. All paths lead to the same goal is the message of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna. So when Tagore talks of a global family it touches his heart as it will stir any intelligent reader's mind.

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